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Mahir Mammedov: SOCAR is one of the world's leading companies



Last week SOCAR Georgia won the two main prizes at the Georgian Business Awards. Here the Georgian Times talks to its Director Mahir Mammedov, who tells us about the finest achievements of the company and its grandiose future plans.

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Seven more Georgian soldiers martyred for NATO



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Seven more Georgian soldiers martyred for NATO

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

Seven Georgian soldiers were killed and nine wounded after a suicide bomber detonated a small truck loaded with explosives in Helmand Province of Afghanistan on June 6.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the bombing in Nawzad district, saying in a statement that one of its fighters detonated a truck "laden with heavy-duty explosives" inside a base, killing several troops and damaging vehicles and equipment.

According to The Ministry of Defense the nine wounded do not have life threatening injuries.

"I want to express my condolences to the families of those heroes. They are patriots, who sacrificed their lives for Georgia's secure future," Defense Minister Irakli Alasania's statement reads. "Despite the attacks Georgian soldiers will not give up, but continue to participate in the ISAF mission," he commented.

Alasania cut short a trip to Brussels, where NATO members this week held a special session on Georgia, to travel to Afghanistan.

Thursday's attack was the second deadly bombing in recent weeks to target Georgian troops in Helmand, which has been the most lethal province for the U.S.-led NATO alliance over the past decade. Three Georgian troops were killed in a bombing May 13. The blast brings to 29 the death toll of Georgian soldiers in Afghanistan.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the commanding general for NATO and United States troops in Afghanistan, offered his con-

dolences to the Georgian people and praised the Georgian contribution there.

"Georgian soldiers have always stood out for their toughness and willingness to take on difficult missions," General Dunford said.

Thursday morning a video was posted on Youtube under the name "Taliban Jihad Against Georgian Troops in Afghanistan."

The video shows Georgian soldiers injured and killed in the mission while the commentator claims the "same fate" awaits all Georgians in Afghanistan while calling for a jihad against the "Crusaders" from the Caucasian state. The video also contains threats to the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, claiming their "revenge" is to take place in Georgia itself.

As Minister of Interior Affairs Irakli Gharibashvili commented the ministry works actively to find out the location, and which IP address the video was uploaded from. "Foreign partners are actively helping us. I can't provide other additional information," Gharibashvili noted, adding that security measures in the country are on the highest level.

President Saakashvili expressed condolences over death of the Georgian soldiers in a live televised address. He declared June 7 as a national day of mourning.

"Georgia made yet another sacrifice on its difficult path to freedom, independence and joining the family of world's civilized nations," Saakashvili declared. "It is our obligation before the memory of our fallen soldiers not to give up, not to step back and to continue mov-



ing towards the Euro-Atlantic space, to continue daily struggle for Georgia's independence."

In his video address on June 7, expressing condolences over death of Georgian soldiers in Afghanistan PM Bidzina Ivanishvili said that Georgia "will continue fight for peace in the world."

"I want to express deepest sorrow for this disastrous tragedy. I pay homage to the deceased soldiers, I offer my condolences to the Whole of Georgia, I share the pain of each soldiers' family, that will be soothed by nothing. The whole of Georgia is mourning with them," Ivanishvili commented.

According to the PM, Georgia has made a huge sacrifice for the struggle for international security and the entire world knows about it.

"The fight against terrorism is difficult, but at the same time a very honorable mission," he noted. "Far from Georgia, on

foreign land, our troops are defending our homeland at the cost of their lives. These guys stand guard for stability of our country and for the security of our future generations."

As the Ministry of Defense informs, Georgia receives condolences from all over the world over the death of Georgian soldiers. According to the ministry, NATO Deputy Secretary-General Alexander Vershbow and NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia James Appathurai personally expressed their condolences to Irakli Alasania.

Georgia's Defense Minister received a phone call from Supreme Allied Commander Europe Philip Mark Breedlove.

"NATO representatives express their deepest sorrow for the loss Georgia suffered in Afghanistan and offer condolences to the families of the fallen Georgian soldiers. They extended gratitude to Defense Minister that besides

the irreparable human loss, the Georgian military servicemen continue to fulfill the international mission courageously," the statement of Ministry of Defense of Georgia says.

U.S. Ambassador in Georgia Richard Norland also offers condolences to Georgia and Georgian people on death of Georgian soldiers.

"I am deeply saddened to hear of the loss of seven brave Georgians soldiers in Afghanistan today. On behalf of my country, I extend my deepest sympathies to the families of those killed and wounded in Afghanistan, and to the entire Georgian people and nation," stated Norland.

According to the US Ambassador, Georgian soldiers were targeted because they are strong, fight without preconditions or fear, and show the bravery and heroism that are emblematic of all Georgians.

"They fought shoulder-to-

shoulder with U.S. Marines and Afghan government forces in Afghanistan - as equals, friends and brothers. This is a fight for the values we share," said Norland.

"This is a huge tragedy for our country, for our soldiers, for each of our citizens. Although the Georgian society should realize the importance of this mission for our country," commented Irakli Sesiashvili, Chairman of Defense and Security Committee of the Georgian Parliament. "I know that after this tragedy it's not easy to realize but we should remember that fighting against terrorism in Afghan is fighting against terrorism in our own houses," he added.

On June 7 several people gathered in Tbilisi demanding the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Afghanistan.

Nino Burjanadze, the leader of the opposition party Democratic Movement and former Parliamentary Speaker of Georgia shares the idea, calling the government to make a proper decision and not allow Georgian soldiers to die in such places where they are not supposed to be.

According to Sesiashvili, in 2014 Georgia will move to another stage of ISAF mission, which means that Georgian soldiers will not be actively involved in operations and the participation of troops will be less risky than it is today.

"If we change the number of our soldiers or think of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, it might need even more time; so we should not let terrorists scare us and continue fighting for Georgia's future," Sesiashvili told The Georgian Times.

Georgia became the largest non-NATO troop contributor to ISAF mission after it almost doubled its presence in Afghanistan to over 1,560 soldiers last autumn.

Georgia has two battalions in the Helmand province and up to 50 soldiers in Kabul.

Georgian troops have been in Afghanistan since 2004, a commitment that underscores Tbilisi's ambition to join NATO, despite fierce opposition from neighboring Russia.

NATO Week Marred by More Georgian Troop Deaths in Afghanistan

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

NATO Week, opened in Tbilisi on June 3 by high-ranking Georgian and North Atlantic Treaty Organization officials, was overshadowed by the deaths of seven Georgian soldiers in Afghanistan. An attack on the troops' position coincided with a YouTube video "Taliban Jihad

against Georgian Troops in Afghanistan".

NATO Week is being held in Georgia for the sixth consecutive year. It was the second time when the event was opened by the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, James Appathurai, who arrived in Tbilisi in

order to arrange the upcoming visit of the North Atlantic Council.

"Georgia has achieved stable, continuous progress, which includes implementation of reforms, contribution into the Euro-Atlantic security and getting closer to NATO. It is pleasant that the new government continues the reforms launched by the former authorities in various areas," Appathurai said at the opening ceremony held in the Court-

yard Marriott Hotel.

Alex Petriashvili, Georgia's Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration, in his turn emphasized the importance of the event and the arrival of the NATO delegation. The main issues discussed at the meeting were bilateral and multilateral relations of the parties.

The same day, an international seminar on "Public awareness about NATO integration processes" was held in the Courtyard Marriott. The participants from



NATO's aspirant states Georgia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina mulled the prospects of each state becoming members of the Alliance.

A photo exhibition reflecting Georgia's and Romania's participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and a number of meetings with students, lecturers and civil society was held the following days in different regions all over the country.

On June 5, Petriashvili and

military attaches of NATO states visited Poti's Coast Guard Base; later they attended a presentation on reforms in the field of state border administration. Meanwhile, the Deputy State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration David Dondua and Head of the NATO Liaison Office in Georgia William Lahue met NGO representatives in Zugdidi and talked about NATO-Georgian relations.

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Sozar Subari: I would like to resign as soon as possible

By MAKAR DEKANOSIDZE, GT

During the previous government it was difficult to obtain any information about the penitentiary service, and this remains so today. However it is now possible to ask the Minister direct questions about what is going on in the nation's prisons. geotimes.ge here tries to gain a comprehensive picture from Sozar Subari, the Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance.

- Mr. Subari, you have taken on a very difficult task. You have inherited a system whose failure ultimately caused the downfall of the previous government. The present situation is not ideal and consequently accusations are often made about your own performance too. What can you say about this?

- Not only the penitentiary system but the whole of Georgia has inherited difficult problems. Even in the spheres where the previous government was considered to have made progress problems remain. For example, the previous government stamped out corruption at lower levels, e.g. in the police, but elite corruption is still there. In the penitentiary system both types of the corruption, both petty and elite, are still there.

The key problem in the penitentiary system was the brutal torture of the inmates. This was used as the standard method of prison control. Many could not bear it and received psychological trauma along with physical injuries. The previous government also supplied thousands of inmates with psychotropic drugs so they would keep quiet and not complain about the abuses they were seeing. This worked in the short term but has given the inmates serious longer term problems, both physical and psychological. They have become drug dependent, and now it is very difficult for them to get over this dependency. In fact, the Saakashvili government deliberately made thousands of people into drug addicts and destroyed their health artificially.

Therefore we face numerous problems today. The infamous videos from the prisons last September just added to these problems. After this footage was released the situation got out of control but at the end of October, when the new government took power, the old system was destroyed. Now the prison system has been restored and is functioning in a different way. Obviously however, there are still many abnormalities in the system which derive from the Saakashvili period.

Giorgi Tughushi, the Public Defender, who was not very critical of the government, stated in his 2011 report that 7-8% of

the prison inmates who had died in that year had not died of natural causes. 144 men died in prison in 2011, and therefore according to these figures at least 12 died as a result of violence. Naturally, this situation no longer exists and will not be repeated.

On the other hand, there are questions over what a proper prison system should look like. Some people thought it was abnormal that a prisoner dared to call a TV programme and call the Prime Minister a liar, but what is abnormal about this? Prisoners have the right to use a phone during set hours, they have TV and they see what is happening in the world. The prisoner exercised his legal rights, called a programme and asked a question. It is true that we are not accustomed to prisoners doing such things, but what is abnormal about it? Is it a normal situation when a prisoner cannot dare do something because he is afraid of being punished?

However there are mobile phones in the prisons, and we are fighting against this as the previous administration did. Look at the official statistics; about 100-150 mobiles were taken away during Saakashvili's time, the same as the quantity of drugs. We have a similar situation with mobiles right now, but the drug situation is better.

It has been reported that an inmate in Kutaisi died from a drug overdose. The Ministry has been waiting for an expert's report before commenting - what did the report say?

The expert said that the prisoner died of cirrhosis of the liver and no drugs were found in his system. A small quantity of psychotropic drugs was found in his blood, but this was not linked to the death.

Mr. Subari, strong criticism was aroused when two separate explanations were released for the death of Geguti Prison inmate Levan Kortava. Kortava's mother says you are to be held responsible for his death if you do not punish the guilty. What do you have to say about this?

It is true that the press centre initially released the wrong information about Kortava's death. This was changed an hour later, i.e., immediately I was informed about the mistake. The misunderstanding arose because our press centre had been sent an official letter. I will read you an extract from it: "I would like to inform you that during the division of the residential blocks the mentioned inmate likely slipped whilst accessing the stairs of the sixth residential house. As a result of multiple falls on the steps he received damage to various parts of his body". I did not think that such a mistake would occur, given the time in which this information could be

checked (the incident took place on May 12 and the inmate died on May 23).

Why the information about falling on the stairs released if it was wrong? It now seems that the prisoner was injured in another way, at a different time - why was this not known?

This is what we are investigating. The director of the prison has been dismissed, the other details are being investigated by the Prosecutor's Office. As far as I know the guilty person has been identified, and the only reason no charges have been brought is that we do not have forensic analysis yet.

Can you tell us who committed this crime, the prison administration or one of the prisoners?

I cannot specify, the prosecutor will say what happened. Everyone involved in this crime will answer for it.

During the previous government web-cameras were installed in all the cells and confidentiality, even during conversations with attorneys and while making confession, was not protected. The public suspects that these practices continue. What is your response?

The recording of conversations does not take place today. The camera infrastructure has not been entirely removed, but the main thing is that it is not related to recording things. Most of the old video recordings were taken away by the previous government. We recently found part of this footage and delivered it to the Prosecutor's Office. This material will be useful to the investigation into the brutal treatment of inmates. I have not tried to find out what information these recordings contain, if any. That is the business of investigation.

Your opponents used to say that there was a high rate of self-harming in the prisons last year and that the ministers were responsible for this. Do you also face this problem?

There is no prison in any part of the world where self-harm does not take place. There is no more self-harming going on now than before, but less information was released before. Sometimes the self-harm is so serious that it can endanger the person's life. There are frequent cases of swallowing spoons, forks, nail cutters, and other items. When a person swallows things several times their body cannot continue to endure the required surgery and thus they may die. Do not ask me why the inmates have those items; all prisoners have spoons and forks.

Why do you not exclude the possibility that Bacho Akhalaia was falsely accused of the torture of prisoners, as the prisoners could equally have injured themselves and then blamed him for it?

I was a Public Defender, I have

studied many cases and there are cases in which I have protected Bacho Akhalaia from false allegations. For example, on January 2/3 2006, when the special detachment entered Prison Number Seven to conduct its research, some of the human rights defenders there declared that all the inmates had been beaten, been disabled, etc. I studied the situation and stated that not all the inmates, but only three, had been beaten, and this was because they had refused to be examined to see if they had hidden any item inside them. I know it is invasive, but sometimes this is a necessary procedure.

Are prisoners obliged to go through this procedure now? Would not some inmates consider this sexual harassment?

Sexual abuse is one thing and search is another. This method of search will continue to be used until we bring in special equipment. You are required to act correctly, and consequently cannot refuse to search a prisoner just because it is invasive. We have found about 34 mobile phones this year, and about half of them were hidden in people's backsides. Similar procedures are used in any modern airport, but nobody cries about rights violations. We will have modern equipment soon, which will make control easier.

There are frequent accusations that you are finding it difficult to control the situation in the prisons - you may deny this, but it is being said that prisoners are putting prison officers under pressure, is this so?

I cannot deny that there are difficulties. We reject the practices adopted in Georgia until now. One was the brutal violence of the Saakashvili period prison administrations and the other was the Shevardnadze period practice of letting the Thieves in Law rule the prisons with their own methods. There is a third way between these two. Nobody's rights should be violated but order should also be maintained. Of course, this is the most difficult path to follow, but the only right one. We need public support and regular scrutiny in order not to make mistakes.

What is the reconviction rate of prisoners released after amnesty? The United National Movement regularly complains about this when talking about the increased level of crime in the country....

The statistics will give you the full picture: 7% of inmates released under Presidential Amnesty have been reconvicted and the reconviction rate of inmates released through a reduction of their sentence is 1.5%. The same figures apply to the prisoners released in our amnesty. 32 drug dealers were released by Presidential Mercy after it was clearly stated in their court verdicts that they had been sentenced for drug dealing.



Two senior members of the previous government have been detained. Is this an additional responsibility for you?

The main difference between ordinary inmates and Merabishvili and Akhalaia is that those two are in solitary confinement. As for the overall conditions of their confinement, we cannot be criticized for these. If someone does not like something he can speak to the attorneys. We cannot have double standards, and the demand that we hold former ministers under other conditions is not fair.

Bacho Akhalaia moved to the Penitentiary System from the Public Defender's Office and it was said that he became more severe in character as a result. Is it possible that Sozar Subari will change in the same way?

It is necessary to be strict, but not to be unfair. A position only spoils a person when he wants to be spoiled to begin with. A decent person will not be spoiled; power, being a minister or being Prime Minister are nothing to a decent person. My

greatest wish is to resign as soon as possible and start a more peaceful job.

Are you thinking about this seriously?

Yes of course, how could I not think about it? I miss my kids. Do I not have the right to be with them for a decent period of time? I am thinking about it, but I am needed in this job for a certain period. As soon as I consider that I have done all I can do, what the hell.

And where do you see yourself working in the future, in which sphere?

I will go where I am needed. People are not born ministers. I used to be a journalist, the Editor in Chief of a newspaper, I used to lecture on justice at Tbilisi State University, I was a Public Defender, I was a psalm-reader... I have been chair of one party and political secretary of another. I have huge experience in the non-governmental sector, I am still an advisor for UN HCR. So I have broad experience and I can always find an interesting job.

NEWS

MOSCOW DEMANDS LAW ON OCCUPIED TERRITORIES TO BE ABOLISHED

Official Moscow called on Georgia to abolish its "Law on Occupied Territories" on June 6.

The announcement was made by Grigory Karsin, Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs while speaking with Russian media after meeting the Georgian Prime Minister's special representative Zurab Abashidze.

According to Karasin the acting Law on Occupied Territories endangers tourists.

"The main thing that endangers our tourists is criminal charges for visiting Abkhazia and South Ossetian. We consider that the only right decision would be to make a decision to do away with this law," Karasin said.

As Karasin explained to ITAR TACC, the negative tensions accumulated between Russia and Georgia since 2008 is intolerable.

According to Karasin, since Georgia's Parliamentary Elections in October of last year, in which the Georgian Dream coalition was victorious, it was a positive signal for Russia and dialogue was considered as possible. However, the issue of recognition of Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is not the subject of revision, he mentioned.

"A lot still needs to be done and this includes visa facilitation. It must be mentioned that we extended issuing humanitarian visas to Georgian citizens. This concerns those working in the scientific-technical field, culture and sports. We will continue working on it," Karasin said.

Fady Asly: Arrests have a very negative impact on Georgia's investment and business climate

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

Various foreign and local organizations claim that economic growth will slow down in Georgia in 2013. As the government explains, one of the reasons of lowered economic forecast is that businesses remain in a wait-and-see mode. Why are Georgian businesses not active? How do the arrests of politicians and businessmen affect foreign investment? What are the concerns of the business sector and what changes are businesspeople in Georgia waiting for? To get the answers to such important questions, The Georgian Times interviewed Fady Asly - Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC).

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development EBRD as well as Geostat and other important organizations lowered their forecasts for economic growth in Georgia in 2013. The Georgian government says that the reason for this is that Georgia is going through a transitional period - there are political changes, a lack of foreign investments and businesses still remain in a wait-and-see mode. Are businesses in general really in a standby mode? Why are businesses not active today?

The International Chamber of Commerce had stated in December and January that in the best cases scenario the GDP growth in 2013 could reach 3%; when EBRD decreased its growth forecast for Georgia to 3% other rating agencies have followed suit. There are many reasons for that but the most important being the political tension in the country; of course adding further obstacles such as the introduction of a complicated labor legislation, the talk about a new competition law, the arrests of political figures and the learning process of the new government are all factors that contribute to slowing the business activity in the country.

Businesses are wary of the changes and are therefore observing without immediate plans for expansion; by the same token major Georgian banks are not keen to extend large loans in this nebulous situation so all those factors compounded are negatively impacting growth.

What conditions do the businesses have in Georgia nowadays? Is this sector developing? What are the main problems in Georgia's business and how can they be resolved? Does Georgia really offer an

open, competitive and liberal economic market for business?

Businesses require many factors to succeed, the most important one being long term stability; unfortunately the current situation is not stable and beside the shock that resulted from an unexpected change in government the new authorities are introducing new legislation that is complicating the life of businesses. Furthermore, since a couple of months ago, the Revenue Service is being very aggressive in its audit of businesses and is over-estimating tax dues and penalties and requesting tax payers to make advanced VAT payments to the budget.

The government has to secure a peaceful political and business environment to allow businesses to flourish; they cannot come every day with some new initiative that would scare businesses off.

What are the reasons for the slowdown in the inflow of foreign direct investment? What do you think could be done to increase the number of investments from abroad?

The political row between the Prime Minister and President is very negatively affecting investors' perception of the country. When Georgia is in the international news everyday for some negative issue no one should expect investors to be lining up at the airport. What we need to do to attract investors is provide stability and long term visibility. I sincerely hope that the picture will change after the presidential elections in October and that investors' interest towards Georgia will increase starting in 2014; one should bear in mind that Georgia is not the navel of the world and that there are several emerging markets that offer attractive conditions to investors worldwide. Having said that, I believe that the private

equity fund that is in the process of being created by the Prime Minister could serve as a vehicle to jump start foreign investment - that is of course if this fund will be properly engineered and structured.

When Georgia is in the international news everyday for some negative issue no one should expect investors to be lining up at the airport.

Last week Lithuanian businessman, Saulius Vaitkevicius was arrested and then released by the court. As his wife, Vaiva Vaitkeviciene told foreign media, the prosecutors were interested in her husband's links with Georgia's previous government. What do you think about this particular case? Will this have a negative effect on the inflow of foreign investments in Georgia? How will it reflect on Georgia's reputation abroad?

I have no information about the case you have mentioned beside what I have read in the press; frankly I am glad that Mr. Vaitkevicius was released by the court; the last thing we needed on our hands now is a new arrest that would have further deteriorated the business climate; I personally believe that one would be naïve to think that any arrests including that of politicians are not having a very negative impact on the investment and business climate and that they are not deterring major investors. At a time when the economy is seriously crippled, the government will have to choose between "restoring justice" and "building the economy" since trying to do both at the same time is not working; what would be reasonable to do under today's exceptional economic circumstances might well not be what justice requires; there could be no economic stability in the country when political figures are arrested every few weeks;

You have been in business for many years; are messages of Georgia's current government always clear for you? Do the business sector and the government have good communication with each other? Does the Georgian government provide all the necessary support that business needs in order to develop?

The relation between business organizations and the government is improving gradual-

ly; we suffered in October and November from very bad communication with the authorities but things have improved a lot since that time and I can consider that we have now a very good working relation. The government is listening to our concerns and doing its best to address them. We should keep in mind that this is a new government that has to go through a learning curve and we need therefore to be patient and support them in the process. I honestly believe that starting in 2014 most issues will be settled and the economy will start to grow normally.

What kind of resources is there in Georgia to start a new business and how easy is it in Georgia to get credit from banks nowadays?

There is no doubt that there are many business opportunities in the country; one should not forget the privileged location of Georgia and its role as a hub for the region; there are challenges to deal with such as the inaccessibility of our neighboring markets due to the monopolies and protectionism that our neighbors have created; however, in 2015 we would have concluded by then our deep and comprehensive free trade agreement with the European Union and this will give Georgia a pool of five hundred million consumers which is a huge advantage for Georgian businesses.

Currently the interest rates offered by Georgian banks are high and unappealing for anyone who wishes to develop a competitive business. I am confident though, that interest rates will go down gradually from 2014 onward.

The new law on labor code was a much discussed topic a few weeks ago; what was the main reason for concern within Georgia's business community? What was changed to satisfy the business sector?

We had no major objection regarding the principle of amending and improving the Labor Code; however, we believe that the timing for redrafting the legislation was ill chosen. We had forwarded a letter to the Minister of Economic Development in November 2012 advising the government to postpone discussing the Labor Code till the end of 2013 on the basis that the political changes in October [2012] had



frozen investments, banking activity and business and stalled the economy; it was therefore counterproductive to further worsen the business environment by drafting and complicating the Labor Code this year; the business community has worked closely with the government and parliament to amend some "lethal" parts of the legislation that was prepared initially by the Ministry of Justice; we are glad that some of our remarks were taken into consideration for the benefit of the economy. The law is still under discussion and we sincerely hope that we will succeed in improving it further.

What are your expectations for 2013 in Georgia in terms of the country's business development?

I think that 2013 will be a difficult year for the economy and we will be very lucky to reach 3% GDP growth which by itself is already a good performance considering the internal tug of war in the country. I can assure you that 2014 will be a much better year for our

economy and we will be making up for whatever we have lost in 2013 provided of course the government works towards securing a stable business and investment environment.

On May 30, the 16th National Business Award contest took place in Georgia organized by media holding The Georgian Times and the social and market research company GORBI. You attended this ceremony. What do you think about this event in general and in your opinion, how important is it for the development of the business sector to hold such events?

The 16th National Business Award Ceremony was a very good initiative from The Georgian Times and GORBI. In this difficult year for businesses it was important to focus on the success of those companies who, despite a difficult environment, have performed well and contributed to creating jobs and building the economy. They are a good example and incentive for other businesses to follow.

NEWS

LATVIA'S SEIMA DELEGATION TO VISIT GEORGIA

Delegation of Defense and Internal Affairs and the Corruption prevention committee of Latvian Seima will pay four day visit in Georgia today. The delegation will be led by the chairperson of the delegation of Latvian MPs Aomars Latkovskis.

Chairperson of parliament of Georgia Davit Usupahvili will meet the Seima delegation today. Meetings are planned with the chairperson of the defense and security committee of parliament Irakli Sesiashvili, chairperson of the foreign relations committee Tedo Japaridze and chairperson of the European integration committee Viktor Dolidze.

Within the visit in Georgia, representatives of Seima delegation will arrive in Gori and visit so called administrative border.

Meeting with the EU monitoring mission representatives is planned.

On 11 June, the Latvian MPs will visit Vaziani military base, where they will meet the Defense Minister Irakli Alasania. They will also visit the Ministry of Justice to meet anti-corruption council representatives.

The delegation will leave Georgia on 12 June.

Azerbaijan Embassy Celebrates Republic Day

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

On June 5, 2013 in the Radisson Blu hotel, the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Georgia held a reception to mark Azerbaijani national holiday - Republic Day, when 95 years ago, the first secular Muslim republic was established in the east.

On the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Georgia hosted representatives of diplomatic corps accredited in Georgia. The event was attended by senior Georgian officials, parliamentarians, diplomats, as well as representatives of the

Azerbaijani community, representatives of Azerbaijani intelligentsia living in Georgia and non-governmental organizations working on issues of ethnic minorities.

Among those in attendance were **Davit Usupashvili**, head of Georgian Parliament, **Paata Zakareishvili**, Minister on Reintegration Issues, **Irakli Gharibashvili**, Interior Minister and others. The celebration began with the sounding of Azerbaijani and Georgian national hymns, followed by Azerbaijani Ambassador to Georgia **Azer Huseyn** congratulating participants on the 95th anniversary of the establish-

ment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. He declared that Georgia is a very important country for Azerbaijan and that the friendship between the countries is an example for other neighboring countries. He also highlighted that both countries declared their independence in the same period.

Each year on May 28, Azerbaijan celebrates one of the most significant days in its history - the creation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic - ADR (*AzYrbaycan Xalq Cumhuriyyeti*), which was the first secular republic in the Muslim east.

On May 28, 1918, Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Transcaucasian Dem-

ocratic Federative Republic, thus forming the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Azerbaijan became the first democratic parliamentary republic in the Muslim world. It declared its independence again in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR.

Azerbaijani intellectuals played an active part in spurring democratic reforms and in the struggle to uphold and develop civil rights during a time of upheaval in the early 20th century in the Russian Empire. The bourgeois revolution that took place in February 1917 gave rise to attempts to create the Transcaucasian Federative Republic, which would have included the peoples of the South Caucasus. But the diffi-



cult socio-political situation and the First World War postponed the idea of a federation and on May 26, 1918, the Georgians decided to dissolve

the Transcaucasian Sejm (Parliament) at a meeting held in the Georgian capital Tbilisi. Georgia declared its independence the same day.

NATO Week Marred by More Georgian Troop Deaths in Afghanistan

Continued from p. 2

In the frames of NATO Week, various sports and intellectual activities were also held. A race that took place on the Batumi Boulevard gathered upwards of 50 students who had to run two kilometers from the boulevard to Shota Rustaveli State University. iPods were awarded to the three first place winners. Winners of the debates on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were also rewarded with iPods by the State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Romania to Georgia **Dumitru Badea**.

However, while NATO officials and Georgians played games, the tragic developments of June 6 in Afghanistan horrified and threw into confusion the entire Georgian nation: at first a video containing threats to Georgian soldiers serving under NATO's command in Afghanistan and President **Mikheil Saakashvili** appeared on YouTube; then **James Appathurai's** condolences on Georgian servicemen death were published on Facebook; and finally Defense Ministry released an official statement – 7 soldiers were dead and 9 wounded. These were the results of a devastating suicide truck bomb attack on a Georgian outpost in Helmand, a southern Afghan province that has long been a Taliban stronghold.

The video "Taliban Jihad Against Georgian Troops in Afghanistan" was conceivably uploaded to YouTube in the morning of June 6; while, according to Taliban's propaganda website "Voice of Jihad", the attack itself was launched on Nawzad district, where the Georgian base is situated, at 4:00 PM local time (3:30 PM Tbilisi time). The suicide bomber "Abdul Ghafar from Kandahar Province detonated his truck laden with heavy-duty explosives inside a large ISAF base, located on the road in Anrak Karez area", killing "20 foreign invaders and wounding dozens of others."

In Tbilisi many experts linked the video with the events of the day, claiming that similar footage was created against Spaniards before an attack that took place in Madrid in 2004. **Mamuka Areshidze**, Head of Caucasian Centre on Strategic Research stated that the video arouse suspicion as there was only a few months left until the Georgian troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan and it was not clear why it was made. Nevertheless, he recommended the government to tighten security measures in the country. Meanwhile, **Temur Kighuradze**, a journalist of PIK TV recognized that the video contained footage that he shot in Afghanistan back in 2010. Meanwhile, Georgian MIA has announced that it is working actively to find out the location and the IP address that the video was up-

loaded from.

In honor of the fallen soldiers, Georgia lowered its state flags on June 7 for a national day of mourning. Dwellers of Tbilisi and Batumi went to the streets expressing their sorrow for the death of the military men in Afghanistan. The protesters held posters proclaiming "We don't want NATO" and "Stop sending our boys to be slaughtered".

"I fought in Afghanistan too. It was during the Soviet period. The Soviet Union was not right back then when it sent its soldiers to Afghanistan and neither is the West [right]. These soldiers are volunteers, but on the other hand – they go due to financial problems," one of them emphasized.

Giorgi Gbedava, a representative of NGO "Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights", told the Georgian Times that both the old and new authorities consider that Georgia will get Membership Action Plan (MAP) by sending more troops to Afghanistan. "No one is going to grant us MAP, and especially accept us into NATO just for our participation in the ISAF Mission and for the deaths of our soldiers," he stressed.

"No one is going to grant us MAP, and especially accept us into NATO just for our participation in the ISAF Mission and for the deaths of our soldiers"

The deaths of seven Georgian troops has prompted politicians to start thinking about

reducing the number of Georgians deployed to Afghanistan. "Among non-NATO states we are the largest contributors to the Afghan mission. Maybe we shall revise this decision," Member of Parliament **Eka Beselia** told the journalists. However, the overwhelming majority – both authorities and the opposition – stays firm: the mission shall be continued in spite of the great losses – 29 servicemen killed.

Moreover, soldiers serving in Afghanistan appealed to Georgian society, assuring them that they knew where they were going and why. "We are not occupants; we are there because we do not want Russian occupants in Georgia. I understand that we are a small nation and each victim is a huge loss for us but every day at least one American dies there and Georgian press doesn't cover this... You, regular people, take this in a more emotional way but we are there for a safer world," they said in their statement released on TV.

In solidarity with those killed in Afghanistan no event was held in frames of NATO Week on June 7. A NATO youth summit will mark the conclusion of the week on June 10.

NATO Week in Georgia was organized by the Information Centre on NATO and EU, co-facilitated by the Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration and supported by the Romanian Embassy and the NATO Liaison Office in Georgia.

NEWS

Rasmussen: We expect Georgian government to hold free and fair Presidential Elections

The second day of the NATO Defense Ministerial started with the session of the NATO-Georgia Commission on June 5. As geotimes.ge was informed from the Ministry of Defense, the meeting was opened by **Anders Fogh Rasmussen**, the General Secretary of the Alliance who said that Georgia is a special partner and its participation in NATO operations is very important.

"I am pleased to welcome you to the meeting of the Georgia-NATO Commission. Georgia is a special partner for NATO and a nation, which wishes to become a member of the Alliance. Its commitment to the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan is significant. Georgia is indeed the number one non-NATO troop contributor to ISAF. We greatly appreciate the act of support of Georgia for our operations both in the past and currently. We highly value the professionalism and the courage of Georgia's Armed Forces and we salute the sacrifices that it made. Given the very demanding reforms that Georgia is currently carrying out in defense sector, these efforts are all more impressive. NATO cooperates with Georgia in implementing its reforms and allies stand ready to continue to share their experiences and to provide their support," declared Rasmussen.

He said that NATO also continues to follow with great interest the challenges and developments that Georgia is experiencing within its borders. NATO expects from the Georgian government to respect the rule of law, human rights and the rights of minorities.

"We also continue to follow with great interest the challenges and developments that Georgia is experiencing within its borders. We expect from the Georgian government to respect the rule of law, human rights and the rights of minorities. We encourage Georgia to pursue these key reforms and to strive to hold free and fair Presidential elections at the end of this year. And we reiterate our unwavering support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within internationally recognized borders," mentioned Rasmussen. He said, that a stable and democratic Georgia has its place within the Euro-Atlantic Community.

"I look forward to a future when Georgia will be the part of the Alliance. The decisions taken at the NATO Summit in Bucharest remain valid. Georgia will become a member of NATO as soon as it fulfills the membership criteria," said Rasmussen.

Following the NATO Secretary General's speech, Minister of Defense of Georgia **Irakli Alasania** addressed the ministers of defense. He focused attention to the reforms ongoing in Georgia and in the field of defense of the country, as well as on Georgia's involvement in the ISAF mission. As the Minister outlined, by contribution to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, Georgia reaffirms that it is not only a consumer of security but is actively engaged in establishing peace worldwide.

SOCAR'S MULTI-FUNCTIONAL BUILDING OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR



AMAZING SOCAR-MCDONALDS ON THE BLACK SEA COAST IN BATUMI

Mahir Mammedov: SOCAR is one of the world's leading companies

By MALKHAZ GULASHVILI, EMMA BAIRAMOVA, GT

Last week SOCAR Georgia won the two main prizes at the Georgian Business Awards. Here the Georgian Times talks to its Director Mahir Mammedov, who tells us about the finest achievements of the company and its grandiose future plans.

Mr. Mammedov, SOCAR Georgia was declared best Georgian company of 2012 and you yourself were declared best businessman of 2012 at the Georgian Business Awards, an annual competition organised by The Georgian Times. How did you achieve this?

First of all, let's begin by saying that we are very glad that this competition has been reinstated. Unfortunately, such ceremonies have not been held in Georgia for 2-3 years, but there was public demand for them, everyone respected and took an interest in such ceremonies and we also missed them. We have participated in this competition ever since we entered Georgia and I always envied the companies which won it. I have aspired to create an equally successful company. The leading companies in Georgia once again participated in this last ceremony, the 14th, and it was very difficult being in the list alongside them, but we managed to win the competition.

I especially want to congratulate Mr. Malkhaz Gulashvili. There were a lot of jokes during the ceremony about how Malkhaz Gulashvili had spent his free time when he was forced to have plenty of time to spend (laughs). Everybody spoke about him with some warmth; we felt from the hall that the public missed these ceremonies and Malkhaz Gulashvili.

As to how we won the award, it would have been a bit strange had we achieved this five years ago, because then we had just entered the Georgian market and were planning our future projects and learning from other colleagues. We learned both to compete with them and also have friendly relations with them so that we developed in parallel with them. I think our development is obvious now. We have developed in the right way as our strategic, long-term projects were appropriate. In this short period of time we have become one of the leading companies in Georgia.

At the awards one of your guests proposed that the best

company be chosen not by means of voting but by comparing economic indicators. We like this proposal, because throughout our own development we have also created material wealth for thousands of people amongst the working population of Georgia.

Can you tell us how many employees you have hired since you entered Georgia and some way you have addressed the social problems of the country?

Today we have 4,778 employees if you include those at the Kulevi terminal, or 4,167 otherwise. We started with zero. Of these, only 88 are specialists invited from other countries, so 4,690 of our employees are citizens of Georgia. For me it was especially flattering that we were chosen as best company by means of voting. Naturally every company voted for itself, but the true leader was revealed when the second preferences were factored in. I voted for our company first, and if anyone else did the same I understand because the participants were really strong companies and all of them would have been worthy winners. But it is very good that the business community has acknowledged our work. Over the past few years, together with our colleagues (some of them did not participate in the ceremony) we have managed to make a small contribution to making Georgia a better country.

What is the structure of your company?

We began here as a representative office, which represented the interests of SOCAR in Georgia, whose task was to address social and humanitarian issues, interact with the public and representing the economic interests of Azerbaijan. SOCAR Georgia Petroleum is a big company which forms part of the large holding SOCAR Energy Georgia. Then Kulevi was built, and the terminal began to function as legal entity in its own right. We then created SOCAR Georgia Gas in 2008. I want to point out that we did this immediately after the war, when conditions for investment in Georgia were not very attractive. We nevertheless signed a contract about the large-scale gasification of Georgia in December 2008. The contract said that about 150,000 subscribers would receive gas and about 40 million would be invested but today 147 million has been invested in this project and 176,000 people supplied with gas. We checked these sta-



DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SOCAR ENERGY GEORGIA, MAHIR MAMMEDOV

tistics today. We meet frequently with the Ministry of Energy of Georgia and can say that a very high percentage of Georgia is now gasified.

The Government of Georgia was right to involve SOCAR in undertaking such a large-scale task. Since we entered Georgia we have maintained the intensity and dynamic of our investment activities, even during hard times, election periods and changes of government. We have imposed on ourselves some liabilities and the government is supporting us.

SOCAR has taken a leading position in the spheres of gas-filling stations and oil products distribution in Georgia. Our first filling station was opened on 25 December 2008 and on May 31 we opened our 110th. In fact we have now completed our auto-gas filling network. I also want to say that as Georgia is becoming a safer country this gives us more opportunity to bring new products in Georgia. We have built our supply chain for the retail and distribution of oil products. We have approximately 25% of the market and our representative office is expanding and we have gained more functions – our social welfare and sponsorship liabilities are now very diverse.

During these last six years we have run or participated in many different welfare programmes, including some in medicine, education and sport.

We spend about 20 million dollars on these spheres, and this figure is growing every day. We are the main partners of the Georgian Olympic Committee, the Georgian Football Federation, the Georgian Chess Federation and many others which we do not advertise. We also help children, for example we support projects which improve the living conditions in all Georgian orphanages.

What other projects would you like to implement in Georgia? It is obvious that SOCAR has become the main lever of the Georgian economy, and the present Georgian government encourages this, but have there been cases where the government has infringed on your rights?

My main goal was that SOCAR should not be perceived as just an ethnic company. This is a Georgian company, SOCAR Energy Georgia, which pays all its taxes 100%. We have been the largest taxpayer in Georgia during the last four years and are proud of this. We have paid more than a billion GEL (1,100,000,000) and this figure is growing. It is not easy for anyone to achieve such figures. In our first year we claimed the second biggest share in our sector and in our third year we became the biggest company in Georgia and have maintained this position since then. Relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan are so strong,

and our people are so important to each other at every level, that I don't think anyone wants to hinder our work. If we make mistakes they are our mistakes, and our successes are ours. We have worked day and night, despite the periods of obvious investment decline, despite crises, despite wars, and we have never given someone reason to think that we do not love Georgia and it is not our favourite country. As a 100% ethnic Azerbaijani I love Georgia as much as my motherland and it is my second home. So I cannot say that we have had any difficulty doing our work. Any problems we have had are common to all businesses operating in Georgia. But we have always made the most of our advantages.

Tell us about the carbonate plant which SOCAR intends to construct. What is this for?

You know that the 21st century is the century of providing the world with food security, because the world population is growing and foodstuff consumption is also growing. But to produce foodstuffs a country has to have good agriculture. It is very good that Prime Minister Ivanishvili has declared agriculture to be the country's priority. One of the main stimulators of good agricultural production is mineral fertilizer. In Azerbaijan we (I mean the Azerbaijan Government) decided to build a car-

bonate fertilizer plant. The funds have already been allocated for this. A huge tender was conducted for this, in which the leading licensed companies of the world participated. During this process we took into account the advantages of Georgia's geographical situation and discussed building a similar plant on the coast of the Black Sea, which gives direct access to world markets. Having a plant there would reduce the price of food, due to the logistics and ease of delivering food from there to other countries, and we have all the means and funds necessary to implement this project. Therefore we decided to address the Government of Georgia and received a positive answer.

Today Georgia has a factory which produces nitrogen and nitrate, but nitrate (saltpetre) is not a carbonate. It has many applications but is not as effective in agriculture as a carbonate. Carbonates are the most effective agricultural fertiliser bases and ecologically safer and easier to use. There is thus greater demand for carbonate fertilisers. Some of the products our plant produces will be sold in Georgia at preferential prices.

The government has allocated us a 69 hectare land plot between Poti and the Kulevi Terminal (on the Black Sea coast) called a free industrial zone.

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This plant will produce 700 tonnes of products per year. Its Azerbaijan counterpart is already working successfully. On March 13 of the current year President of SOCAR Rovnag Abdullaev declared that after consultations with the Georgian government he had instructed the winner of the Azerbaijan tender – Samsung - to begin producing the project plan for the Georgian plant. Work on the technical and economic aspects of this project is being undertaken and will be complete by the end of July. We will present this to the Georgian government and proceed further.

We will invest more than 500 million dollars in this project. Of course, at some point this project will also help resolve the unemployment problem.

Approximately how many employees will you hire for that project?

From 350 upwards, even up to 500 people.

And their salaries?

I cannot say at this point. Of course, small salaries are unacceptable in Georgia. The salaries must be respectable. We can say that the salaries of those who work in our filling stations and in our holding are double those offered in other

Georgia. But first of all, Rovnag Abdullaev loves Georgia. He served in the army in Georgia, and many members of his team are from Georgia, for example Suleiman Qasimov (Vice President on Financial Issues), Davud Mamedov (Vice President on Recycling Issues and Vagif Valiev (Head of Investment). Rovnag Abdullaev loves coming here and sometimes he comes to the concerts of international stars SOCAR has financed. SOCAR is dynamically developing, and of course in the process of this consultations with the Georgian Government take place frequently. These are the reasons why Rovnag Abdullaev comes to Georgia very often.

We also hold official openings of SOCAR facilities and projects at which his presence is required. You know we fund the grandiose Urbnisi project, which has no parallel in Post-Soviet countries. We built the McDonald's in Batumi and Marneuli and also the Marneuli Tea House, where the best Azerbaijani cuisine and traditions are presented in the best way. So Rovnag Abdullaev has interesting places to come to.

Has the new government changed the conditions of Georgia's cooperation with SOCAR or will everything continue as before?

and the world market, regulated by market rules.

We know that Mahir Mamedov is a very energetic leader; he undertakes many large projects and travels to Baku very often. How do you manage to find time for everything?

The distance between Baku and Tbilisi is not 600 km, it is 4-5 hours by car, because the roads are very good now, and just 40-50 minutes by plane. There are flights to Baku twice a day, and sometimes I travel to Azerbaijan 2-3 times in 2 days. I have to travel to Azerbaijan so often because there are all sorts of legal documents we have to reconcile with Head office. All our work requires daily contact both by phone and in person. Besides, my family is in Baku, so I spend my weekends there. But I have a very good team, consisting of very high quality specialists, who help me do all this hard work. They are continually improving their skills.

How does your family react to this?

My family always take great pleasure in coming to Georgia. They love Tbilisi, they have friends here, they like Georgian national cuisine and the architecture of Tbilisi, so coming here is a very good holiday for them.



companies in this industry.

Rovnag Abdullaev comes to Georgia often, does he come in connection with government issues or simply issues concerning SOCAR?

SOCAR plays an important role in the social and economic life of Azerbaijan and is involved in many welfare projects, from social to sports projects. We do the same in Georgia. The first branch of SOCAR was opened in Georgia, but today we have representative offices in 14 countries and a huge chain of filling stations in Switzerland, Ukraine and Romania. Georgia was the pioneer, because first representative office was opened in Georgia, so the President of SOCAR has many tasks to perform in connection with

Everything is the same, and we often meet representatives of the new government, take permissions from them and have consultations with them. They are paying more attention to the social direction in fact.

So can you say that a change for the better has occurred?

We have reduced the price of gas to mutually affordable levels. Gas prices in Georgia compared with neighbouring countries were low to begin with, and now they are even lower. The prices of oil products have also noticeably decreased, by approximately 15%. They cannot get any cheaper yet, because Georgia is part of the world economic system and prices are connected to those of the world economy

What do you think Yanukovich (PM of Ukraine)'s statement about the White Stream gas pipeline, which would stretch across the Black Sea from Batumi to Crimea and link the gas transmission networks of Georgia and Ukraine?

I cannot comment on this statement, but I can tell you what I do know. Recently the 20th Anniversary Conference-Exhibition on Oil and Gas in Azerbaijan was held, and as is traditional it was opened by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. By the way, Georgia's Minister of Energy Kakha Kaladze also participated in this event (he was in Baku on the third day of his farewell match tour). The Shah-Deniz-2 consortium has taken the decision that

Azerbaijan and Turkey will build a big Trans-Anatolian pipeline called TANAP, 80% belonging to SOCAR and 20% to the Turkish side. SOCAR intends to maintain 51% of the shares subsequently, while the rest can be sold. This pipeline is very important because Azerbaijan and Turkey have already decided to build this pipeline while Europe is still short of making any decision. This month, the consortium will also declare what it finally decided was the best pipeline route to Europe: the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, TAP, or Nabucco West, the TAP for Balkan countries and Nabucco West for Central Europe? So at the end of this month a final decision will be clear.

What concerns me about Yanukovich's statement is that I think he has just proposed this project, meaning that it must still be discussed by politicians of the highest rank. This is not within my competency. All representative offices of SOCAR play an important role in the economic life of the countries in which they work, but not their political life.

How does your day begin? At what time do you wake up?

My working day lasts 16-17 hours. I wake up at eight o'clock, come to work at 9.30 and go home at 23.00 or 00.00.

Do you play any sports? How do you maintain your energy and manage to be so fit? We are not asking about chess!

I am good at sport, I would say. I used to play sports a lot. I

love to play chess on the internet before I go to bed, although it excites the brain, especially when I lose. I particularly love long distance running and run on Saturdays or Sundays. Once I ran marathons, but now I do just 7-8 km. on a track.

How do you assess the process of the coming to power of a new government in Georgia?

You know, this was a very interesting process. For the first time in the history of Georgia power changed hands by legal means.

The first time was when Zviad Gamsakhurdia took power...

Yes, but at that time the situation was different. That choice of the Georgian people was just emotional. It was the scrapping of one great political formation and the establishment of another. But there was very weak historical objectivity at that time, and subsequent events have shown this, as incompetent government has caused problems such as losing territory, etc. In the last parliamentary elections (in 2012) people had the opportunity to make a reasonable choice with their minds, not just be led by emotions. After the mixed situation of 2002 the people have had 10 years to dynamically develop as an electorate. We cannot say that during these years there has only been stagnation or degradation here, this is not true, because Georgia has achieved great success in different directions. It is always a

pleasure to see positive changes taking place in Georgia, because we greatly support this country. But I will repeat that this was the first fair and democratic election in the history of Georgia. This is an important step to achieving more positives in Georgia. I wish Georgia a very good future. Looking at today's situation, I can see that my wish is likely to come true.

We conduct our annual awards ceremony for Georgia, but The Georgian Times would like to hold such a competition for the whole Caucasus. Of course the event would be held in Tbilisi, but companies from Armenia and Azerbaijan would also participate. We will identify a good business auditing company and determine the winners by examining economic indicators. What do you think about this?

Yes, it would be good to choose the best company on the basis of economic indicators, as voting processes can be very interesting... I can guess how our Armenian colleagues will vote! (Laughs) I can say who will be the most objective! I can also guess who will win! By the way, SOCAR has already issued Eurobonds twice, the first issue being worth 500 million dollars and the second about a billion dollars. So SOCAR is already a European company. Issuing these Eurobonds generated a great boom for us, and we had really good economic indicators.



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COMMUNITY

Averssi and PSP Companies Help 10 Member Turmanidze Family

By EKA GAZDELIANI, GT

The socially vulnerable Turmanidze family lives in a simple shelter in DidiDighomi. Head of the family Gela Turmanidze is unemployed; by trade he is an electrician, but despite many trials he has not able to find a job.

There are seven children, the eldest 13 and the youngest 7 months. The family is expecting another baby in September as TamrkoTurmanidze, wife of Gela Turmanidze, is pregnant. She told geotimes.ge that the baby is due on September 3.

The older children do not goto either school or kindergarten. The eldest daughter completed 5th grade, but due to lack of finance was unable to attend 6th grade.

Despite their situation, the Turmanidzes think they will now be able to send their children to school and kindergarten with the support of various companies and a state allowance.

"I would like them to study, get an education and achieve something," says TamrikoTurmanidze.

The family is completed by



Tamriko's mother. "My mother helps me very much. I do not know how I would cope with everything without her," says TamrikoTurmanidze.

The Georgian Times visited the Turmanidzes accompanied by LaliBregvadze and NatiaKhabeshvili, representatives of Averssi and PSP respectively, who gave them gift vouchers, the PSP one worth 500 GEL voucher and the Averssi one 100 GEL.

The company representatives explained that the family



will be able to buy any product in their pharmacy networks with the vouchers. "Averssi was informed about this family with your support. The condition of the family is so difficult that we could not refuse to support it. We think our little assistance will help them somehow. We will do our best to provide assistance to the family in future as well," said LaliBregvadze. "We found out that the family required assistance. They have many children, and will need not only medicine but hygiene and care products," said NatiaKhabeshvili.

"We are very happy. These gifts were unexpected. I would

like to thank PSP and Averssi. Due to my pregnancy I have been prescribed various medicines that these vouchers will be very useful. I have no words, I am so happy," said TamrikoTurmanidze

The company representatives said goodbye to the family and promised continued support in the future. 5 year old GiorgiTurmanidze said goodbye to them in return with a "precious thank you".

The Averssi and PSP companies first demonstrated their willingness to support this family on May 31, during the annual business awards ceremony hosted by The Georgian Times and GORBI.



Russia's latest Fencing Operation reinforces Kremlin's Geo-strategy

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA, GT

Russian border guards deployed in South Ossetia, a Georgian separatist region, which the 2008 Georgian-Russian war was fought over, began a land grab on May 26 of what has hitherto been considered territory within "Georgian proper" under Tbilisi's administration. While the Georgian public is largely focused on local and Western media coverage of this development, it is important to take into account how the relatively minor move falls into Russia's larger geo-strategy in the region, and provides an avenue for Moscow's to reinforce political influence in Georgia, often through more subtle means.

For over a week now, Russian troops have been observed installing barbed wire fencing along a 25-30 km length of the border stretching from the ethnic Georgian villages of Ditsi of

Gori district and Dvani of Kareli district. The beginning of this latest encroachment appeared carefully timed, having coincided with Georgia's Independence Day celebrations.

Media reports are now claiming that 200 meters of Georgian territory has been enveloped by the new fence in the border village of Perevi. A similar incident also occurred in adjacent areas of Gori district. It appears that the Russian and Ossetian sides are seeking to build a "Berlin Wall" type fence along the administrative border line between the Georgia and South Ossetian controlled areas, and this assessment is not surprisingly being lauded by officials in Tbilisi.

The new border delimitation activities, which further cut Georgia off from what it considers occupied territory is yet another sign that Moscow is ignoring its international obligations and international law, as stipulated by the Helsinki 1975 Acts and the so-called 6-point peace plan that brought an end to the war in 2008.

From the Russian perspective, and based on recent statements from Tskinali, the Kremlin is simply fulfilling its commitment under a bilateral agreement that it reached with the separatist authorities in 2012 (signed by Alexander Bortnikov, the Russian FSB Director and Lt. General Boris Attoeva Head of the South Ossetian Committee of State Security). This was based on a previous "inter-state" agreement signed in April of 2009 which envisaged increasing security measures along South Ossetia's border with Georgia and fostering closer cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation and the breakaway region of South Ossetia.

Russia or the authorities in South Ossetia are indifferent to the fact that such a move technically contradicts international law. The Medvedev-Saakashvili-Sarkozy armistice framework only called for an end to hostilities between Georgia and Russia following the Five Day War in August 2008 and it provided no concrete mechanisms for actually resolving the conflict. Hence, by ignoring the

provisions of the armistice, the Russians are directly demonstrating that they are capable of imposing their will by military means, i.e., Moscow is ready to conduct war games to achieve its geopolitical objectives in the region. Moreover, the South Ossetian authorities' decision to detain several ethnic Georgian villagers who had strayed across the border over the past several weeks is a reflection of Moscow's strategy to create a more aggravated situation in the region and prepare the public for its possible consequences which are now being played out. It is even conceivable that Russia's next steps could be to stage military provocations with the purpose of forcing the Georgian leadership to respond militarily to developments in the region, as have transpired in the past, with drastic ramifications for Georgia and its allies. Moscow's clear and straight forward strategy of undermining stability in the conflict zone can be determined by the following concrete goals:

There is little doubt that Russian wants to prevent Georgia's further integration into Euro-

Atlantic structures, especially after Georgian Prime-Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's announcement at the NATO PA Rose-Roth international seminar in Tbilisi that Georgia aspires to obtain Membership Action Plan (MAP) status in 2014. Russian wants to sort out regional security so as to quickly provide and reinforce security arrangements at the regional level in light of Russia's upcoming Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014.

Moreover, Moscow's fencing operation along the border further reinforces its presence and influence over Georgian politics and foreign policy. Such implications are often subtle. For example it was not by coincidence that Mikhail Khomeriki, President of the Georgian Diaspora who used to be Russia's official lobbyist, suddenly appeared in Tbilisi in response to the latest news. This follows similar moves, such as when Valery Khaburdzania, Georgia's former Security Minister, who earlier this year announced his intentions to set up a pro-Russian political movement, arrived in Georgia in April 2013.

Such political choreography

can be compared to how the United States used it leverage in Georgia in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 war by deploying to Georgia the likes of David Smith, of the Washington DC Potomac Institute and Victor Soccor, who often writes for the ultra conservative US based Jamestown Foundation, and whose claim to fame is being a well-known spin doctor by many accounts.

Both Smith and Soccor are considered by many political insiders as America's official or semi-official 4-hire gun lobbyists. Collectively they have checked track records of supporting unsustainable political agendas, including the events of the 2008 Georgian Russian war as proffered by the US and Georgian governments at the time, and based on how they described the previous Georgian governments' violent and deadly crackdown on peaceful protestors in Georgia on May 26, 2011 as necessary.

Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia is a military expert and Associate Professor at Sukhishvili University

Georgian Government Called to Remove Spy Devices from Telecom Companies

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI, GT

Human rights and watchdog groups have called on the Interior Ministry to remove "black box" devices from telecommunication companies, which grant security agencies direct access to communication networks allowing them to monitor text messages, phone calls and internet traffic simultaneously from thousands of mobile phone numbers without any oversight.

According to Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia), the Interior Ministry maintains "black boxes" in the server infrastructure of all major telecommunication companies, giving security services technical capacity to monitor 21,000 mobile phone numbers at the same time.

"We do not know and it is very difficult to exactly to find out to what extent, if at all, the Interior Ministry uses these technical capabilities for unchecked wiretapping," says Eka Gigauri, executive director of TI Georgia.

On May 24 a conference was held in Tbilisi on secret surveillance, privacy rights and personal data protection – issues which have been a source of concern in Georgia for the past several years but which only became subject of intense discussions with an active government engagement in recent months. Concerns of privacy rights being systematically violated were fur-

ther exacerbated after a leak of a sex video of a fierce critic of some senior officials earlier in May. First, Georgia's deputy interior minister was charged in connection to the video's leak, allegedly after obtaining a cache of recordings collected through illegal surveillance by the interior ministry under the country's previous government.

The representative of the interior ministry who attended the conference did not specifically address the issue of "black boxes" and said in general terms that the ministry was ready for close cooperation with civil society.

"If there is willingness from the government side, we could really start putting good practices in place already by tomorrow," Pasi Koistinen, CEO of mobile operator Geocell, part of the Swedish-Finnish telecom operator Telia Sonera, told at the conference.

The last six annual human rights reports on Georgia prepared by the U.S. Department of State, from the one covering 2007 to the most recent report covering 2012, repeatedly mention that Georgian were reluctant to discuss, or had stopped discussing, sensitive topics by telephone due to concerns about government wiretapping.

In late October, 2012 the Constitutional Court ruled that operative investigations of private Internet communications would require a court order. The U.S. State Department's 2012 human rights report, however,

said that despite this ruling, the Interior Ministry "appeared to have continued direct access to the technological infrastructure of telecommunication companies, raising fears of continued illegal government surveillance."

"Judges are typically not informed in-depth about the subject matter of the investigation and are not told about the results of the surveillance. In the past, judges have rubber-stamped prosecutors' applications for surveillance and communication interception. It is not clear to what extent this is still the practice," says TI's report.

Judicial authorities say that the standard of scrutinizing requests from law enforcement agencies for secret surveillance and wiretapping has increased in recent months, which to some extent has also been reflected in increased numbers of denials on motions asking for court authorization on secret surveillance.

"The Ministry of Justice of Georgia agrees with most of the recommendations of human rights and watchdog groups. We are working on draft amendments to the Criminal Code of Georgia on "Operative – Investigation Activities" and we are doing our best to meet international standards," commented David Jandieri, Deputy Minister of Justice of Georgia.

"We also call the representatives of the ruling party to fulfill their promise and destroy the archive of illegal surveillance," Gigauri told the Georgian Times.

On May 12 Irakli Garibashvili, Georgia's Interior Minister said at the conference that the



archive would be destroyed as soon as possible.

However, as Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili commented this week the issue is a subject of discussion and government members should hold consultations with experts and professionals. According to the PM, some opponents, experts and professionals object the destruction of the footage material.

"We may find a method in which we may store these materials, for example, like how money is kept in banks or something like that. A few organizations may have access to them, etc. We should do everything to avoid shame," stated Ivanishvili, adding that "footage showing personal lives should never be spread in Georgia again."

Gharibashvili also commented on this topic this week and declared that the Ministry will make a final decision in several days. "The decision must be scrupulously discussed along with holding consultations with ex-

perts," he said.

The current government has vowed to establish strong mechanisms both on the legislative and executive levels to prevent illegal surveillance. A joint hearing of several relevant parliamentary committees was held on May 20 to discuss the planned legislative amendments.

However, as it was said during the May 24 conference in Tbilisi, which was organized by TI Georgia, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and Innovations and Reforms Center, concerns still remain about such practices.

"We cannot rely on the good will of high-ranking officials; we need guarantees that these kinds of materials will not be created, saved or disseminated," stated Parliamentary Chairman Davit Usupashvili, who added that the Parliament is currently working on this issue.

Data only from Georgia's capital Tbilisi indicates that in the first four months of 2013

law enforcement agencies filed a total of 1,195 motions to judges requesting approval for carrying out wiretapping; 1,069, or 89%, out of these motions were approved.

Share of approvals stood at 99.88% and 99.79% in 2011 and 2012, respectively. There were a total of 7,195 such motions filed with the court in Tbilisi in 2011 and 5,951 in 2012.

Thomas Hammarberg, who in February was appointed by the European Commission as the EU's Special Adviser for Legal and Constitutional Reform and Human Rights in Georgia, said on May 20 that the law should clearly define time limits of surveillance and any information that might be obtained through such legally authorized surveillance, but which might not be related to an actual case, should immediately be destroyed. He also recommended that the law should provide provisions obligating the authorities to inform a person, subjected to surveillance, after the surveillance has been carried out.

"There is a need to regulate this so as to make any such surveillance activities unique, extraordinary and only within the frames of the law so that people can trust that they are not being listened to and that their mobiles are not being tapped," commented Hammarberg, who welcomed that such "very difficult issues are discussed in a democratic spirit."

According to TI Georgia, "uncontrolled systematic surveillance and wiretapping is a serious threat to media freedom as well."



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Russia Plans to Develop Captured Georgian Territories

By LISA TONAKANYAN, GT

Russia plans to build over 200 cottages near the administrative borderline in South Ossetia that had been moved deeper into Georgian territory a week ago and offers Tbilisi to abolish its "Law on occupied territories". Meanwhile, Georgia tries to attract the world's attention to its breakaway territories.

an estimate for at least 30 cottages this year," he said.

On the heels of Nurgaliev's statement, the Kremlin urged Georgia to scrap the "Law on occupied territories". Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigory Karasin assures that eliminating the law would "create a favorable environment for cultural exchanges, above all for tourists". "The main thing that endangers our tourists is criminal charges for

sian occupation. "Let Moscow remove the installed barbed-wire fences and the occupation line and we will cancel the law and make many other steps to develop relations," he told journalists.

On June 7, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia organized a trip to the conflict zone for about 30 representatives of diplomatic corps. The visit started from Khruvaleti village in Gori region; then diplomats traveled to Gugutiant Kari and Ditsi, where they were

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gregory Karasin and EU Special Representative Philippe Lefort. Karasin informed Lefort that Tbilisi raised this issue at the Geneva Talks held in March and the South Ossetians declared that they want to arrange their own "state borders as an independent country", though for different reasons Georgia had ignored it.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization in its turn expressed concern with the installation of illegal fences in the



Moscow pays "serious attention" to the frontiers of Tskhinvali Region. During a meeting with South Ossetia's de-facto leadership several days ago, Rashid Nurgaliev, Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council declared that living and social conditions in the region should be improved. According to Nurgaliev, the development program involves the border villages, where schools, kindergartens and roads need to be constructed. He stressed that the people living in those areas have almost no access to medical services; therefore it's absolutely necessary to erect a few "first-aid posts." Moreover, Nurgaliev emphasized the necessity of building about 200 wooden cottages along the borderline. "It does not require any special construction documents. Specific designs already exist. We must pay special attention to the western borders of the [South Ossetian] republic, in particular the districts of Sinagur, Karzman and Dzauri. We could produce

visiting Abkhazia and [South] Ossetia. We consider that the only right decision would be to make the decision to do away with this law", Karasin said after negotiations held with Zurab Abashidze, Georgian Prime-Minister's special representative for relations with Russia. In return, he promises to continue the visa facilitation process.

Georgia will not follow Moscow's instructions – was the response of official Tbilisi. "Adoption and implementation of laws regarding specific territories is Georgia's business," stressed Tamar Beruchashvili, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who expressed hope for Russia's constructiveness.

David Bakradze, leader of Georgia's parliamentary minority promised to be the first to vote against the "Law on occupied territories" after the withdrawal of Russian armed forces from Georgia's territories. According to Bakradze, if Russia doesn't like the law, then Georgia is not in raptures over Rus-

familiarized with the process of "borderisation" implemented by Russian border guards.

As Zaqaria Vaitidze, Ditsi's Governor told The Georgian Times, after the fence installation some houses and pastures fell into the territory controlled by the Ossetian party. He informed that through the barbed wires the diplomats were able to talk to Davit Vanishvili, a local resident, who stayed on the other side of the "border". The representatives of diplomatic corps found the situation in the area more complicated than they imagined based on the information they had before the trip. The diplomats were accompanied by the chairman of Temporary Commission on Territorial Integrity Giorgi Volski. "This visit gave our foreign partners an opportunity to get the information from first hand as they were able to talk to locals on the both sides of the newly established fence," he stated.

The situation on the administrative borderline has become a subject of discussion between

conflict zone. James Appathurai, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, visited Georgia on June 3 and said that NATO's position is similar to the EU Monitoring Mission and the United States. According to Appathurai, construction of illegal separation fences is a violation of the existing agreements and it hampers the movement people residing in the area.

U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Richard Norland called on the parties of the conflict to fulfill the ceasefire agreement. "Unilateral moves cause concern and will be discussed at an appropriate level," he asserted.

Russian soldiers started erecting a new fence close to the Georgian village of Ditsi on May 27, moving the de facto border 300 meters into Georgian-controlled territory. Chairman of NGO "Peaceful and Business Caucasus" Aluda Makharia assures the administrative border was moved 200 meters deeper inside Georgia in Perevi village, Sachkhere Region.

NEWS

Moscow Demands Law on Occupied Territories to be Abolished

Official Moscow called on Georgia to abolish its "Law on Occupied Territories" on June 6.

The announcement was made by Grigory Karasin, Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs while speaking with Russian media after meeting the Georgian Prime Minister's special representative Zurab Abashidze.

According to Karasin the acting Law on Occupied Territories endangers tourists.

"The main thing that endangers our tourists is criminal charges for visiting Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We consider that the only right decision would be to make a decision to do away with this law," Karasin said.

As Karasin explained to ITAR TACC, the negative tensions accumulated between Russia and Georgia since 2008 is intolerable.

According to Karasin, since Georgia's Parliamentary Elections in October of last year, in which the Georgian Dream coalition was victorious, it was a positive signal for Russia and dialogue was considered as possible. However, the issue of recognition of Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is not the subject of revision, he mentioned.

"A lot still needs to be done and this includes visa facilitation. It must be mentioned that we extended issuing humanitarian visas to Georgian citizens. This concerns those working in the scientific-technical field, culture and sports. We will continue working on it," Karasin said.

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James Appathurai: Russia in not meeting its International Obligations

James Appathurai, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia condemned developments at Georgia's border with breakaway South Ossetia and blames Russia for violating its international obligations. As he said, the situation at the so-called "occupation line" and willful installations of fencing is the reason for his disappointment. He made the statement during his exclusive interview at the Public Broadcaster.

"We have been introduced with the information, and have seen the report of EU Monitoring Mission report. We are concerned by the construction of illegal separation fences, which is a violation of the existent agreement and hampers movement of the population. All of this will prevent the creation of a more stable environment. It is clear, that this is a violation of the obligations taken by the Russian Federation. Finally, this is a negative development of the situation. We strictly stand by our position referring to Georgia's integrity and sovereignty. Steps made by Russia are made in the wrong way. Georgia should be confident that it will receive NATO support. I would like to say that I share the idea that the situation is disappointing, especially, when there are steps made by Georgia towards improving relationship with Russia. We have the same position as the EUMM and the United States and condemn what is happening on place," Appathurai explained.

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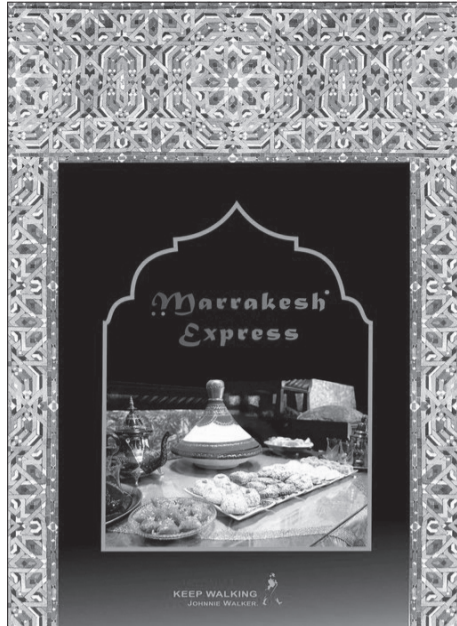


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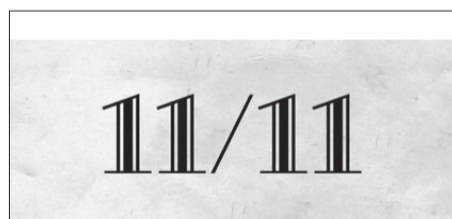
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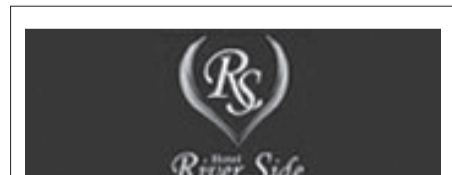
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- ეროვნული სასწავლო ოლიმპიადის მესამე ტურში გასული აბიტურენტები ჩვენთან ისწავლიან უფასოდ
- ჩვენ გთავაზობთ გაცვლით პროგრამებს ამერიკის შეერთებული შტატებისა და ევროპის უნივერსიტეტებში.
- სტუდენტებს შეუძლიათ გადაიხადონ სწავლის გადასახადი მ ნაწილად.
- შბსუ-ში ასწავლიან მსოფლიოს სხვადასხვა ქვეყნებიდან მოწვეული პროფესორები.
- სწავლა მიმდინარეობს ინგლისურ და ქართულ ენებზე.

შსსუ-ს ჰაიხინოჰი უნივერსიტეტები

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