

Commentary

Crisis in Krgyzstan; U.S. interests hit a snag

By Frank Bennett Rowder

The recent unrest in this small, mountainous Central Asian nation is threatening the government of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who has led his country since 2005. Demonstrations started on April 6, 2010 in the western city of Talas-where government agencies were seized-and then spread to the capital city of Bishkek. As the situation worsened, the border with Kazakhstan was closed.

Opposition leaders in the past have demanded the Bakiyev regime close the U.S. base there because they are concerned our country may also use it for a bigger operation against Iran, especially if the U.S. continues to have problems with Tehran's nuclear buildup. However, it should be noted that the Kyrgyz's secular Muslims and Islamics are not playing a role in this uprising.

The real heart of the discontent is economics. The country has raised the price of heating fuel

and electricity by 200 percent. Kyrgyzstan's economy is broken into three areas: Services (39 percent), Agriculture (38 percent), and Industry (23 percent).

Rose Otunbayeva, a Kyrgyz lawmaker and former foreign minister under Bakiyev, is leading the opposition and she has already brought in new management in the Security Service and Interior Ministry Departments.

Russian Federation Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has denied any involvement in this conflict but stated that Bakiyev has been making the same mistakes as previous President Akayev. Putin also stated that this is the reason the country has remained impoverished since the collapse of the old Soviet Union in 1991.

Rowder is a free-lance writer and a member of the Chicago International Press Club's board of directors.

U.S.-Russians conflict on adoptions by American parents



MOSCOW--The Russian Foreign Ministry is standing by its announcement that all adoptions had been halted until the two countries could work out an agreement in the wake of a Tennessee mother's decision last week to put her 7-year-old adopted son on a plane back to Moscow alone.

But the U.S. State Department is not buying it. According to a report, the State Department had reached out to the Russian Embassy in Washington, and the U.S. Embassy in Moscow has reached out to the Foreign Ministry and had been told on both ends that adoptions already underway are still moving.

There has also not been a suspension of new adoption cases, U.S. officials said. According to officials in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, there are 281 Russian children awaiting adoption by 232 American families.

U.S. officials are expected to meet with Russian authorities next week to discuss international adoptions and possibly a new bilateral agreement, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told ABC News in a statement.

"There are many loving families in the United States hoping to adopt children from Russia," Crowley said. "It is in the interest of these children that our two countries reach a suitable arrangement that allows such adoptions to continue. We have a team going to Russia next week to try to reach an understanding so suitable adoptions can continue."

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said he is concerned about the recent treatment of Russian children adopted by Americans.

More than a dozen Russian children have died in the hands of their American adopters.

Testify at State Senate hearings for 1 Chinatown district

SPRINGFIELD, IL.--Members of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC) and Asian American Institute (AAI) testified at the Illinois State Senate Redistricting Committee hearing in Springfield Monday to keep Chinatown in one district. The committee, chaired by Sen. Kwame Raoul, is currently considering reform proposals to change the way political maps are redrawn next year.

The redistricting in 2001 cut Chinatown into four wards, four state representative districts, three state senate districts, and three Congressional districts.

"Asian Americans have an important stake in the redistricting process, given the severe harm caused by past redistricting that has fragmented Asian American neighborhoods in Illinois," said Ami Gandhi, AAI Legal Director.

"Given the historical and ongoing dilution of minorities' votes in Illinois, it is crucial that redistricting reform legislation explicitly and

effectively protect the voting rights of minority communities,"

Gandhi said. "Legislation must also provide for greater public input and transparency so that all Illinois residents have a fair opportunity to elect their representatives."

The Chinatown community is defined as encompassing 59 contiguous precincts densely populated by more than 22,000 Chinese Americans in the neighborhoods of Chinatown, Bridgeport and McKinley Park. Other Asian American communities in West Ridge, Albany Park and Uptown have been similarly divided.

"Even though we have close to 6,000 registered Chinese voters and 22,000 Chinese residents, we are so cut up that our votes don't matter...our voices are not heard," said Bernie Wong, president of the Chinese American Service League. "We are not represented and our issues are ignored."

SHOWBIZ

Actress Dixie Carter dies from cancer

HOUSTON, Texas--Actress Dixie Carter has died from complications of cancer, her agent Steve Rohr said Saturday.

She was an American film, television and stage actress, best-known for her role in the sitcom "Designing Women" (1986-1993). She was nominated for the Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series for "Desperate Housewives" in 2007.

"This has been a terrible blow to our family," her husband, actor Hal Holbrook, said. "We would appreciate everyone understanding that this is a private family tragedy." Holbrook said the cause of her death was caused by complications from endometrial cancer.

Carter made her professional debut in a Memphis production of "Carousel" and moved to New York City three years later where she got a part in a production of Shakespeare's "The Winter Tale."



She had appeared in numerous television shows and starred in several Broadway musical and plays.

She married for the third time in 1984 to Holbrook who is most noted for his appearances as Mark Twain. Her final film was "That Evening Sun", which she filmed on location with Holbrook in 2008.

In addition to Holbrook, she is survived by two daughters, Mary Dixie and Ginna.

'Oz' Munchkin Raabe dies at 94



ORANGE PARK, Florida-- One of the few surviving Munchkins from the 1938 "Wizard of Oz" movie died from cardiac arrest after collapsing in Orange Park, Fla. Meinhardt Raabe, 94, was one of the 124 Munchkins in the classic film.

Raabe played the Munchkin coroner in the film and announced to Dorothy (played by Judy Garland) that the wicked witch of the East was "really most sincerely dead." Wearing a costume that included a hat with rounded edges and a yak hair colored long mustache and beard, he said: "As coroner, I mean I did the review, and death is not only easy, it's really most sincerely dead."

Raabe was born in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1915 and was a City Midget at Chicago's World's Fair in 1934. He also participated in other shows, including the San Diego Exposition in 1935.

"By working with these world fairs as a dwarf, I was able to make my studies," Raabe said.

He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Drexel University, University of Wisconsin, and later at master's in business administration. Raabe married Marie Hartline, who worked for a vaudeville show called the "Rose Royal Midget Troupe" in 1946.

Conan begins tour before TBS gig in November



The 2010 Conan O'Brien tour announced today will take place in 30 cities

LOS ANGELES, Calif.--Charlie Sheen is making waves and is telling friends he wants to leave the CBS show, "Two and a Half Men," though the CBS network has a contract for the hit show for at least two more seasons.

Variety reports that Warner Bros. is believed to have offered Sheen \$1 million per episode, a deal worth \$48 million for the remaining 48 episodes.

His contract with Warner Bros. is up this season, according to his representative Stan Rosenfield. "Charlie has done this for seven years," he said. "There are new things to do, new challenges. He wants to do more movies, and doesn't always get the opportunities during the hiatus of the show."

"The popularity of the show speaks for itself," Rosenfield added. "It delivers huge ratings for CBS. It benefits Warner Bros. and Charlie understands why they want it to happen, but the truth of the matter is that there is no contract after this season."

Sheen faces domestic violence charges stemming from a Christmas Day fight with wife Brooke Mueller. Rosenfield said his desire to leave the show is not connected to Sheen's concern about the pending litigation.

China car sales jump in March

BEIJING-- Auto sales in China rose 56 percent to a three-month high in March, a jump that auto dealers are attributing to discounting.

A total of 1.73 million vehicles were sold in China last month, with passenger cars surging 63 percent to 1.26 million units. Commercial vehicles climbed 75 percent to 470,200 units, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers First quarter sales moved up to 76 percent to 3.52 million units.

CAAM expects the domestic auto market to

grow 15 percent this year.

But some dealers said the number of visitors to showrooms has started to reverse since March and new orders have declined, prompting them to offer price discounts to spur demand.

Analysts expect the growth to slow this year as smaller tax incentives may weaken demand. A report by CAAM showed sales of passenger vehicles with capacity of 1.6 liters or less accounted for 69 percent of the total passenger-car segment, 3 percentage points lower from a month earlier.

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