

### ***The Middle East***

Nazarbayev was hesitant to court investment from the Middle East, despite high levels of Turkish and Iranian commercial activity in Central Asia. Unlike the other Central Asian republics, Kazakstan initially accepted only observer status in the Muslim-dominated ECO, largely out of concern not to appear too "Muslim" itself. Over time, however, the president moved from being a professed atheist to proudly proclaiming his Muslim heritage. He has encouraged assistance from Iran in developing transportation links, from Oman in building oil pipelines, from Egypt in building mosques, and from Saudi Arabia in developing a national banking system.

### ***Russia and the CIS***

Most of Kazakstan's foreign policy has, not unnaturally, focused on the other former Soviet republics and, particularly, on the potential territorial ambitions of Russia. Since Gorbachev's proposal for a modified continuation of the Soviet Union in late 1991, Kazakstan has supported arrangements with Russia that guarantee the republic's sovereignty and independence, including a stronger and institutionally complex CIS.

As the CIS failed to develop a strong institutional framework, Nazarbayev attempted to achieve the same end in another way, proposing the creation of a Euro-Asian Union that would subordinate the economic, defense, and foreign policies of individual member states to decisions made by a council of presidents, an elective joint parliament, and joint councils of defense and other ministries. Citizens of member nations would hold union citizenship, essentially reducing the independence of the individual member republics to something like their Soviet-era status. The proposal, however, met with little enthusiasm, especially from Russia, whose support was crucial to the plan's success.

Nazarbayev pursued bilateral trade and security agreements with each of the former republics and in September 1992 unsuccessfully attempted to have Kazakstan broker a cease-fire between Armenia and Azerbaijan that also would set a precedent for settling interrepublic and interregional strife in the former republics. Nazarbayev also participated in the fitful efforts of the five Central Asian leaders to create some sort of regional entity; the most promising of these was a free-trade

zone established in 1994 among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakstan (see Foreign Trade, ch. 2).

Kazakstan also has contributed to efforts by Russia and Uzbekistan to end the civil war in Tajikistan. Kazakstani troops were part of a joint CIS force dispatched to protect military objectives in and around the Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe. Although Nazarbayev and Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov warned in 1995 that their countries soon would consider withdrawal if peace talks made no progress, the multinational CIS force remained in place in early 1996.

## **National Security**

Kazakstan's national security policy remains closely associated with that of Russia, partly because the military forces of Kazakstan have developed more slowly than planned and partly because of long-standing habits of interdependence. The internal security organization of police, prisons, intelligence gathering, and criminal justice remains substantially as it was in the Soviet era.

## **Military Establishment**

At independence Kazakstan had no army because defense and security needs always had been met by the Soviet army. Initially Nazarbayev, unlike many of his fellow new presidents, argued that his country should function without an independent army, assuming that collective security needs would continue to be met by armies under CIS command. Even when the Russian military establishment changed its oath of service to refer solely to Russia rather than to the CIS, Nazarbayev continued the policy of drafting youth into the CIS forces rather than those of the republic. Even though the republic's strategic thinkers saw Kazakstan as the intersection of three potential military theaters—Europe, the Near East, and the Far East—in the first years of independence, the republic was thought to require only a national guard of no more than 2,500 men, whose duties were envisioned as primarily ceremonial.

When Russia transformed the troops on its soil into a Russian army in the spring of 1992, Kazakstan followed suit by nationalizing the former Soviet Fortieth Army, which remained in Kazakstan, creating the formal basis for a Kazakstani national defense force (see table 12, Appendix).

### ***Command Structure***

The armed forces established in 1992 are subordinate to the Ministry of Defense and to the president in his capacities as commander in chief and chairman of the National Security Council. The second-ranking military office is chief of the General Staff. The General Staff consists of deputy defense ministers for personnel, ground forces, air defense, and airborne forces. The president's main advisory body for national defense is the National Security Council, which includes the prime minister, the first deputy prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, the chairman of the Committee for Defense of the Constitution, the chairman of the State Committee for Emergency Situations, the minister of defense, the commander of the Border Troops, the commander of the ground forces, and the minister of internal affairs. When it is active, parliament has a four-member Committee for National Security and Defense for coordination of defense policy with the executive branch.

### ***Force Structure***

In the mid-1990s, plans called for developing a military force of 80,000 to 90,000 personnel, including ground forces, air forces, and a navy (for deployment in the Caspian Sea). In 1996 the army included about 25,000 troops, organized into two motorized rifle divisions, one tank division, and one artillery brigade. Attached to that force were one multiple rocket launcher brigade, one motorized rifle regiment, and one air assault brigade. Overall army headquarters are at Semey, with division headquarters at Ayagöz, Sary Ozyk, Almaty, and Semey.

According to national defense doctrine, Kazakhstan has a minimal requirement for naval forces. In late 1993, Kazakhstan received about 25 percent of the patrol boats and cutters in Russia's Caspian Sea Flotilla, which subsequently constituted the entire naval force. In 1993 naval bases were planned for Fort Shevchenko on the Caspian Sea and at Aral, north of the Aral Sea, but a scarcity of funds delayed completion. Likewise, naval air bases were planned for Aqtau and the Buzachiy Peninsula on the Caspian Sea and at Saryshaghan on Lake Balkhash.

In 1995 the air force included an estimated 15,000 troops. After the withdrawal in 1994 of forty Tu-95MS nuclear-capable bombers, the Kazakhstan Air Force was left with 133 combat aircraft, whose offensive capability relied on MiG-23, MiG-27, MiG-29, and Su-24 fighters with support from An-24 and An-

26 transport and MiG-25 surveillance aircraft. Thirty air bases are scattered throughout the republic. Since 1992 Kazak pilots have received little air training because units have been staffed at only 30 to 50 percent of operational levels.

### *Officer Cadre*

Creating the projected national armed forces has proved more difficult than expected. Since independence, the officer corps, which was overwhelmingly Slavic in the early 1990s, has suffered a severe loss of manpower. In 1992 nearly two-thirds of the company and battalion commanders in Kazakstan had to be replaced as Russian-speaking officers took advantage of CIS agreements permitting transfer to other republics. When these transfers occurred, almost no Kazak officers were available as replacements. In the entire Soviet period, only three Kazaks had graduated from the Military Academy of the General Staff, and only two had earned advanced degrees in military science.

Kazaks have dominated the top administrative positions in the post-Soviet military establishment. In addition to Minister of Defense Sagadat Nurmagambetov, President Nazarbayev appointed two Kazak colonels as deputy ministers of defense and a Kazak general to head the Republic National Guard (the guard unit responsible for protecting the president and other dignitaries as well as antiterrorist operations). Kazakstan's first National Security Council consisted of seven Kazaks, one Russian, and one Ukrainian. In October 1994, both Slavs left office and were replaced by ethnic Kazaks. Despite a secret call-up of officers in reserve, by the fall of 1993 Kazakstan was short at least 650 officers, while the Border Troops Command, 80 percent of whose officers were non-Kazak, was understaffed by 45 percent.

### *Border Troops*

Kazakstan's extensive land borders are highly vulnerable to penetration by international smugglers, illegal immigrants, and terrorists. In 1992 the Eastern Border Troops District of the former Soviet Union was dissolved; this action resulted in the formation of the Kazakstan Border Troops Command under a Kazak general. After this transition, overall control of border security remained with the National Security Committee, formerly the Kazakstan Committee for State Security (KGB). The border troops commander is a member of the National Security Committee and a member of the Council of

CIS Border Troops Commanders, which was established in 1993 to foster regional cooperation. Cooperation with Russia, with which Kazakhstan shares roughly half its borders, is the primary goal of border policy, and several agreements provide for Russian aid. Cooperative agreements also are in effect with the other four Central Asian republics.

Kazakhstan's border troops force is estimated at 5,000 to 6,000 personnel. Troops are trained at the Almaty Border Troops School (formerly run by the KGB) or under a cooperative agreement at four Russian facilities. Headquarters are at Almaty, with several subordinate commands, including a coastal patrol squadron headquartered at Atyrau on the north Caspian Sea coast.

### *Training and Recruitment*

Exacerbating the severe shortage of trained military personnel is the virtual absence of higher-level military training facilities. The only two such schools in existence, the general All Arms Command School and the Border Troops Academy, both in Almaty, are capable of graduating only about 200 junior officers a year, and in 1993 three-quarters of those left the republic. There were also three military secondary boarding schools—in Almaty, Shymkent, and Qaraghandy—and a civil aviation school in Aqtöbe, which is to be converted to a military flight school sometime after 2000.

There are indications of severe problems in filling the ranks of the armed services. Some accounts indicate that as many as 20,000 soldiers were absent without leave from the army in 1993, and desertion and low morale among conscripts continued to be a major problem in the mid-1990s. Another concern is the deteriorating physical condition of inductees, one-third of whom are said to be unfit for conscription. Discipline appears to be problematic as well. In 1993 more than 500 crimes by soldiers were reported in Almaty Province alone; members of the Kazakstani peacekeeping force in Tajikistan reportedly have robbed and raped villagers they were sent to protect. At the command level, in 1993 one general was dismissed for selling weapons and other military goods.

### *Military Infrastructure*

The quality of military support installations declined in the first years of the post-Soviet period. For instance, the chief planner of Kazakhstan's Institute for Strategic Studies has esti-

mated that only in the next century will the republic have the capability to use air-to-surface missiles for defensive purposes. In addition, sensitive facilities inherited by military authorities from the Soviet army all are said to be on the point of collapse. Facilities in bad repair include nuclear test and storage facilities at K kshetau, the BN-350 breeder-reactor at Aqtau, and a tracking and monitoring station at Priozersk. Even the first Kazak cosmonaut, who was sent into space with great pomp in June 1994, was in fact a Russian citizen and career officer in the Russian air force, as were his two "Ukrainian" shipmates.

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakstan was the most significant site of military-industrial activity in Central Asia. The republic was home to roughly 3 percent of Soviet defense facilities, including more than fifty enterprises and 75,000 workers, located mostly in the predominantly Russian northern parts of the country.

A plant in  skemen fabricated beryllium and nuclear reactor fuel, and another at Aqtau produced uranium ore. Plants in Oral manufactured heavy machine guns for tanks and antiship missiles. In Petropavl, one plant produced SS-21 short-range ballistic missiles, and other plants manufactured torpedoes and naval communications equipment, support equipment for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), tactical missile launcher equipment, artillery, and armored vehicles. There was a torpedo-producing facility in Almaty as well. Chemical and biological weapons were produced in Aksu, and chemical weapons were manufactured in Pavlodar.

By 1994 most of Kazakstan's defense plants had ceased military production. All of them required component parts from inaccessible sources outside Kazakstan, principally in Russia. Even more important, the Russian military-industrial complex was itself in collapse, so that Kazakstan's military enterprises no longer could rely on Russian customers. In addition, the great majority of key workers at all these facilities were ethnic Slavs, the most employable of whom moved to Russia or other former Soviet republics.

Substantial elements of Kazakstan's military-production infrastructure nevertheless remain in the republic. In addition, in early 1992 the army nationalized all of the standard-issue Soviet military equipment remaining on the republic's soil. An unknown percentage of this equipment is still in use in Kazakstan, and another portion of it likely has been sold to other

countries. Since independence, at least one new ship, a cruiser named in honor of Nazarbayev, has been commissioned.

The weapons of greatest concern to the world, however, have been the 1,350 nuclear warheads that remained in Kazakstan when the Soviet Union disbanded. Although two other new states—Ukraine and Belarus—also possessed "stranded" nuclear weapons, the Kazakstani weapons attracted particular international suspicion, and unsubstantiated rumors reported the sale of warheads to Iran. Subsequent negotiations demonstrated convincingly, however, that operational control of these weapons always had remained with Russian strategic rocket forces (see Foreign Policy, this ch.). All of the warheads were out of Kazakstan by May 1995.

Kazakstan's other military significance was as a test range and missile launch site. The republic was the location of only about 1 percent of all Soviet test ranges, but these included some of the Soviet Union's largest and most important, especially in the aerospace and nuclear programs. Test sites included a range at Vladimirovka used to integrate aircraft with their weapons systems; a range at Saryshaghan for flight testing of ballistic missiles and air defense systems; a similar facility at Emba; and the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Weapons Proving Grounds, which was the more important of the two major nuclear testing facilities in the Soviet Union. In the four decades of its existence, there were at least 466 nuclear explosions at Semipalatinsk.

The other major Soviet military facility on Kazakstani soil was the Baykonur space launch facility, the home of the Soviet space exploration program and, until 1994, Russia's premier launch site for military and intelligence satellites. Kazakstan and Russia debated ownership of the facility, while the facility itself suffered acute deterioration from the region's harsh climate and from uncontrolled pilfering. In 1994 Russia formally recognized Kazakstan's ownership of the facility, although a twenty-year lease ratified in 1995 guaranteed Russia continued use of Baykonur.

### **Military Doctrine**

In 1992 Kazakstan adopted a three-stage defense doctrine, calling for creation of administrative, command, and support organizations in 1992, restructuring of field forces between 1993 and 1996, and a modernization process leading to establishment of a fully professional military force by 2000. In 1992

Minister of Defense Sagadat Nurmagambetov abandoned the last goal as impractical, calling rather for a combination of conscripts and contract service personnel. In the summer of 1994, Kazakstan's Institute for Strategic Studies called for the complete abandonment of the official defense doctrine. The existing doctrine was criticized for being based on outmoded Soviet precepts that combined fear of hostile military encirclement with a commitment to peace that approached pacificism.

The institute argued that Kazakstan should instead base its defense policies on the assumption that the republic likely would find itself amid border confrontations involving CIS nations, an expansionist China, and Islamic neighbors with enhanced power and ambition. To prepare for such events, the institute recommended de-emphasizing military development and instead pursuing multinational defense agreements along the lines of Nazarbayev's proposed Euro-Asian Union or, absent that, a military alliance with Russia and active pursuit of NATO membership. Kazakstan became a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994.

Following the appearance of the institute's evaluation, the Ministry of Defense has acknowledged that the second of its original goals—restructuring of field forces by 1996—likely could not be achieved. This admission meant that Kazakstan's dependence upon Russia likely would become even greater. In January 1995, the two countries signed agreements committing them to creation of "unified armed forces." To deflect criticism that such an agreement was inimical to national sovereignty, Nazarbayev likened the new arrangement to the Warsaw Pact and NATO, as distinct from the formation of a single armed force. At the same time, Russia formally took up shared responsibility for patrol of Kazakstan's international borders (under a nominally joint command), which in practice meant the border with China.

### **Law Enforcement Systems**

Kazakstan's police, court, and prison systems are based, largely unchanged, on Soviet-era practices, as is the bulk of the republic's criminal code. Major legislative changes have concentrated on commercial law, with a view to improving the atmosphere for foreign investment. Formal responsibility for observation of the republic's laws and for protection of the state's interests is divided among the National Security Committee (successor to the Kazak branch of the KGB), the Minis-



try of Internal Affairs, and the Office of the Procurator General. Intelligence and counterintelligence are the responsibility of the National Security Committee. The police (still called the militia) and prisons are the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Office of the Procurator General, formerly charged with investigation and prosecution of unlawful acts, was removed from its investigative capacity by the 1995 constitution. Investigation of crimes shifted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which also is responsible for fire protection, automotive inspection, and routine preservation of order. As of 1992, Kazakstan became a member of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), and Kazakstani authorities have worked particularly closely with the law enforcement agencies of Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Kyr-gyzstan.

### *Courts*

The present court system functions at three levels: local courts, which handle petty crimes such as pickpocketing and vandalism; province-level courts, which handle offenses such as murder, grand larceny, and organized crime; and the Supreme Court, to which decisions of the lower courts are appealed. Until mid-1995, the Constitutional Court ruled as final arbiter on the constitutionality of government laws and actions in cases of conflict.

The present constitution provides guarantees of legal representation for persons accused of a crime, including free representation if necessary, but this right appears to be little recognized by authorities or realized by the public. Pretrial detention is permissible, and a suspect may be held for three days before being charged. After being charged, an accused individual may be held for up to a year before being brought to trial. There is no system of bail; accused individuals remain incarcerated until tried.

Both the police and the National Security Committee have the right to violate guarantees of privacy (of the home, telephone, mail, and banks) with the sanction of the procurator general. The theoretical requirement for search warrants and judicial orders for wiretaps and other violations of privacy often is ignored in practice. When the 1995 constitution was approved, a United States official criticized its lack of protection of civil and human rights. Before the approval referendum, Nazarbayev had announced the dissolution of the

Constitutional Court, which he replaced in October with a Constitutional Council whose decisions the president could veto.

### *Prisons*

The Kazakstani prison system came under attack from human rights organizations in the mid-1990s. In the late Soviet period, eighty-nine labor camps, ten prisons, and three psychiatric hospitals (under the administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) were known to be operating in the republic. At least two of the prisons, at Öskemen and Semey, date from tsarist days. There also were at least four special prisons for women and children, at Pavlodar, Zhambyl, and Chamalghan. The facilities remaining from the Soviet period are badly overcrowded and understaffed. According to a 1996 report from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, government funding of prisons is less than half the amount required, and corruption and theft are common throughout the prison system. The total prison population in 1996 was 76,000, and about 1,300 died of tuberculosis in 1995. Health conditions are extremely poor. Overcrowding has been exacerbated by an explosion of crime among the country's youth and by President Nazarbayev's ongoing policy of harsh sentences for convicted criminals.

### *Crime*

In the early and mid-1990s, crime was increasing at an alarming rate. The police were badly understaffed, overworked, and underfinanced. In 1995 police in Almaty received no pay for three months. A significant drain of personnel has occurred since independence, as investigators and police officers either move to other republics or enter other lines of work offering higher pay. Even before independence, militia authorities complained that staffing was more than 2,000 below full force. In numerous instances, police officers themselves have been involved in crime, especially in such potentially lucrative branches of law enforcement as highway patrol and customs inspection. Under these circumstances, public respect for the police declined seriously.

Since independence Kazakstan has suffered an enormous increase in crime of almost all types. One indication of this explosion has been a series of measures ordered by President Nazarbayev in September 1995, aimed primarily at ending corruption in the police force. The incidence of reported crimes

has grown by about 25 percent in every year since independence, although in the first months of 1995 the growth rate slowed to about 16 percent. The average crime rate for the republic is about 50 crimes per 10,000 population, but the rate is significantly higher in Qaraghandy, North Kazakstan, East Kazakstan, Aqmola, Pavlodar, and Almaty. Crime-solving rates have fallen to under 60 percent across the republic and to as low as 30 percent in cities such as Qaraghandy and Temirtau.

Particular increases have been noted in violent crimes and in crimes committed by teenagers and young men. Contract murders and armed clashes between criminal groups increased noticeably in 1995 and were cited by Nazarbayev as a reason for tightening police procedures. Although Soviet crime statistics were not especially reliable, it is still revealing that in 1988 only 5 percent of the republic's convicts were under thirty years of age, but by 1992 that figure had risen to 58 percent. In addition, there has been an enormous increase in official malfeasance and corruption, with bribe taking reported to be nearly ubiquitous.

### *Narcotics*

Kazakstan offers natural conditions favorable to accelerated narcotics use and trade. Many parts of the country offer excellent growing conditions for cannabis and opium poppies, and the country is located on the route to lucrative markets in the West. Until it ceased production in 1991, Kazakstan's Shymkent plant was the Soviet Union's only supplier of medicinal opiates. The Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated narcotics production and traffic to be 30 percent higher in 1993 than in the previous year. The focus of attention for that ministry, which coordinates the republic's antinarcotics program, is the Chu Valley in south central Kazakstan, where an estimated 138,000 hectares of cannabis and an unknown area of opium poppy fields are under cultivation, providing exports for international smugglers. Because of low funding, efforts to eradicate cannabis and poppy cultivation virtually ceased in 1995.

Almaty has become a crossroads for opiates and hashish from southwest Asia. This role has resulted in large part from lax customs controls and the city's position as a transportation hub. In 1994 an estimated 1.4 tons of morphine base from Afghanistan were stored in Almaty.

An active government narcotics control program began in 1993, although limited personnel and funding have handi-

capped its efforts. In 1994 only 400 police, 100 sniffer dogs, and twelve special investigators were active. Most Ministry of Internal Affairs interdiction occurs along the Chinese border. Cooperation has been sought with the narcotics programs of other Central Asian states and Russia. In 1993 and 1994, Russian forces made eradication sweeps through the Chu Valley, but Russian helicopter support ceased in 1994. Antinarcotics agreements have been signed with Turkey, Pakistan, China, and Iran. Kazakstan also has requested United States aid in drafting narcotics provisions in a new penal code.

Domestic use of narcotics has been confined largely to areas of production, notably around Shymkent. Although only 10,700 addicts were registered in 1991, experts believe the actual number to be much higher. The use of homemade opiates increased significantly in the early 1990s. The Ministry of Health runs a center offering treatment and prevention programs. However, by 1994 lack of resources had made treatment on demand impossible and stimulated reorganization of the program.

### National Security Prospects

Like the other four Central Asian republics (with the possible exception of Uzbekistan), Kazakstan lacks the resources to create an independent military establishment or an effective internal security force. By 1995 policy makers, headed by President Nazarbayev, had recognized the need to remain under the umbrella of Russian military protection, a status reinforced by a number of bilateral treaties and expected to become further institutionalized in future years. The poor state of internal security was a crisis that eluded control in the mid-1990s, despite authoritarian measures by Nazarbayev. But Kazakstan has committed itself to encouraging foreign investment in the effort to salvage the national economy. To provide an appropriate atmosphere for such commercial activity, improved internal security, perhaps with substantial Western assistance, is a necessary step.

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Relatively few monographs have been written on Kazakstan. For historical background in the modern era, *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, edited by Edward Allworth, offers a comprehensive treatment. Useful economic information on the

post-Soviet period is available from the World Bank's *Kazakstan: The Transition to a Market Economy*, the PlanEcon *Review and Outlook for the Former Soviet Republics*, and the Central Intelligence Agency's *Kazakstan: An Economic Profile*. A more concise summary of Kazakstan's geopolitical position in the 1990s is found in Charles Undeland and Nicholas Platt's *The Central Asian Republics*.

Among the most complete historical and social analyses of the country is Martha Brill Olcott's *The Kazakhs*, the second edition of which was published in 1995. *Central Asia*, edited by Hafeez Malik, offers a collection of articles on the history and geopolitics of the region. Current information on political and economic events is found in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service's *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, and current information on environmental issues is contained in that service's *FBIS Report: Environment and World Health*, which before August 1995 was titled *FBIS Report: Environment*. For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 2. Kyrgyzstan



*Kyrgyz kookor, a jug for mare's milk*

# Country Profile

## Country

**Formal Name:** Kyrgyz Republic.

**Short Form:** Kyrgyzstan.

**Term for Citizens:** Kyrgyzstani(s).

**Capital:** Bishkek.

**Date of Independence:** August 31, 1991.

## Geography

**Size:** Approximately 198,500 square kilometers.

**Topography:** Dominated by Tian Shan, Pamir, and Alay mountain ranges; average elevation 2,750 meters. Mountains separated by deep valleys and glaciers. Flat expanses only in northern and eastern valleys. Many lakes and fast-flowing rivers draining from mountains.

**Climate:** Chiefly determined by mountains, continental with sharp local variations between mountain valleys and flatlands. Precipitation also varies greatly from western mountains (high) to north-central region (low).

## Society

**Population:** In 1994, estimated at 4.46 million; annual growth rate 1.9 percent; 1994 population density 22.6 people per square kilometer.

**Ethnic Groups:** In 1994, 52 percent Kyrgyz, 22 percent Russian, 13 percent Uzbek, 3 percent Ukrainian, 2 percent German.

**Languages:** Aggressive post-Soviet campaign to make Kyrgyz official national language in all commercial and government uses by 1997; Russian still used extensively, and non-Kyrgyz population, most not Kyrgyz speakers, hostile to forcible



Kyrgyzification.

**Religion:** Dominant religion Sunni Muslim (70 percent), with heavy influence of tribal religions. Russian population largely Russian Orthodox.

**Education and Literacy:** Literacy 97 percent in 1994. Strong tradition of educating all citizens; ambitious program to restructure Soviet system hampered by low funding and loss of teachers. School attendance mandatory through grade nine. Kyrgyz increasingly used for instruction; transition from Russian hampered by lack of textbooks. Twenty-six institutions of higher learning.

**Health:** Transition from Soviet national health system to public health insurance system slowed by low funding. In 1990s, health professionals not well-trained; supplies, facilities, and equipment insufficient, unsanitary. Contaminated water a major health hazard.

## **Economy**

**Gross National Product (GNP):** In 1993, estimated at US\$2.77 billion, US\$590 per capita, declining steadily in early and mid-1990s. In 1994 growth rate -26.2 percent. Economic growth stopped by insufficient privatization and restructuring, Soviet-era banking system, and rampant corruption.

**Agriculture:** Heavily state controlled, reducing profitability and encouraging subsistence farming; irrigation necessary for more than 70 percent of land. Main use of land livestock raising; main crops corn, wheat, barley, vegetables, potatoes, and sugar beets. Bank credits and input materials scarce for farmers; severe output decline 1991-95.

**Industry and Mining:** Production decline 58 percent, 1992-94, caused by energy shortage and loss of Russian skilled workers. Political pressure maintains unprofitable Soviet-era state enterprises. Main industries machine building, textiles, food processing, electronics, and metallurgy. Iron ore, copper, gold, lead, zinc, molybdenum, mercury, and antimony are mined.

**Energy:** Insignificant oil and natural gas deposits, and coal deposits not fully exploited. In 1994, some 39 percent of imports were fuels. Coal-powered thermoelectric power pro-

duction replaced by hydroelectric power, early 1990s; emphasis on electric power based on abundant water power, providing exportable power bartered for coal from Kazakhstan.

**Exports:** In 1994, value US\$339 million. Main commodities wool, hides, cotton, electric power, electronics, metals, food products, and shoes. Main partners Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and China. Export taxes and licensing substantially relaxed by 1995.

**Imports:** In 1994, mainly fuels, construction materials, ferrous metals, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and machinery. Main suppliers Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China. Import licenses and tariffs liberalized, 1994. Value US\$347 million, 1994.

**Balance of Payments:** In 1992, deficit US\$147.5 million.

**Exchange Rate:** Som introduced as national currency, May 1993, with floating exchange rate. Early 1996, eleven som per US\$1.

**Inflation:** Hyperinflation (1,400 percent per year), 1992 and 1993; rate about 180 percent 1994; 1995 government target 55 percent; value of som supported by international banks beginning in 1993, and price controls reintroduced 1993.

**Fiscal Year:** Calendar year.

**Fiscal Policy:** Drastic tax revenue shrinkage caused revenue crisis and reduced government spending, 1994; widespread tax reform program in place 1995, focusing on enforcement and new land and excise taxes.

## **Transportation and Telecommunications**

**Highways:** In 1990, 28,400 kilometers of roads, of which 22,400 hard-surfaced. Nearly all freight moves by road; plans to supplement connection with China-Pakistan highway, mid-1990s. Fuel shortage restricts vehicle use, mid-1990s.

**Railroads:** Little developed; 370 kilometers of track, one main line in north, 1994. Plans for north-south line begun 1995.

**Civil Aviation:** Two international airports, at Bishkek and Osh; about twenty-five smaller facilities. Beginning in 1991, fuel

shortage diverts international traffic to Almaty in Kazakstan, with reduction in overall transport; regular service to Tashkent and Moscow.

**Inland Waterways:** None.

**Ports:** None.

**Pipelines:** In 1994, 220 kilometers for natural gas.

**Telecommunications:** Little developed; in 1994, about 7 percent of population with telephones. Equipment outmoded, operating at capacity, and difficult to replace. Three national radio stations, very limited domestic television.

## **Government and Politics**

**Government:** Constitution of 1993 prescribes three branches; executive strongest and reinforced with special powers assumed by President Askar Akayev, early 1990s. In election held December 1995, Akayev reelected by 71.6 percent of vote. Council of Ministers, nominally administering executive branch, subservient to president. Bicameral parliament of 105 (upper house 35, convened full-time; lower house 70 members, convening twice yearly) established 1994 at Akayev's request, elected to five-year terms; parliament has opposed Akayev on some issues. Judges appointed by president with parliamentary approval. Some local governments with strong power bases.

**Politics:** Numerous groups appeared early 1990s but no organized party system; government has denied registration to some parties; some neocommunist parties active.

**Foreign Relations:** Post-Soviet attempts at relations with wide variety of Western and Asian countries, based on neutrality, using Akayev's personal diplomacy. Careful cultivation of powerful neighbors Russia, Kazakstan, and Uzbekistan; border tensions with Tajikistan. Fast increasing Chinese economic role watched carefully by government; Western sources of aid endangered by antidemocratic tendencies.

**International Agreements and Memberships:** Member of United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Islamic Bank, Asian Development Bank, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace, World

Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

## **National Security**

**Armed Forces:** Ground forces had 12,000 troops, 1996; air and air defense forces 4,000 troops, border guards about 2,000 troops. Manpower and weapon levels in development stage, 1995. Heavy reliance on Russian command and equipment expected to continue indefinitely.

**Major Military Units:** Ground forces with one motorized rifle division with armor and artillery, attached sapper, signals, and mountain infantry units. Air force with one fighter, one training, one helicopter regiment.

**Military Budget:** Estimated at US\$13 million, 1995.

**Internal Security:** State Committee for National Security, replacing Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB), responsible for intelligence and runs National Guard (about 1,000 troops assigned as "palace guard") and border guards. Police (militia) system, unchanged from Soviet era, includes 25,000 personnel under centralized command.





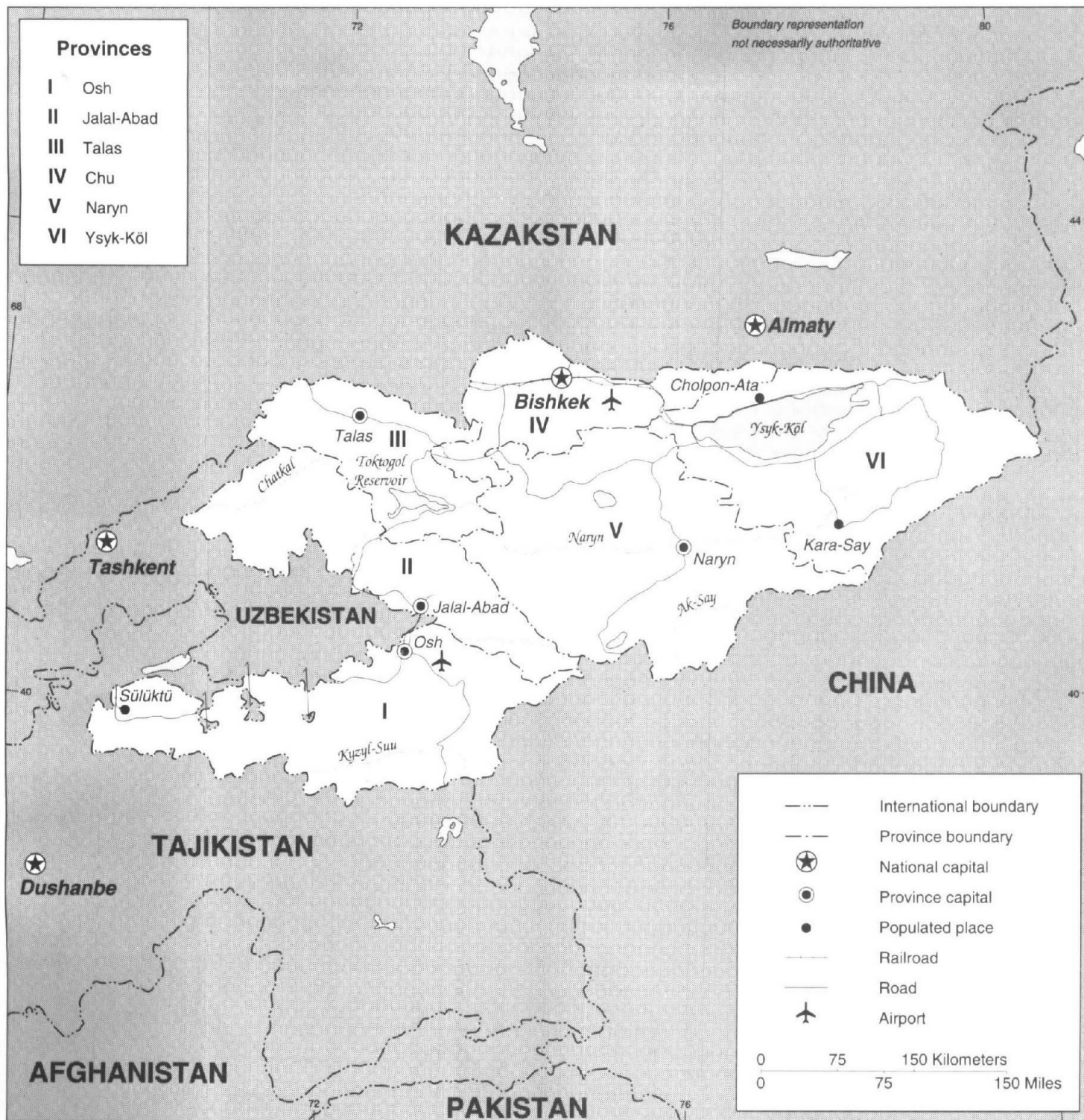


Figure 8. Kyrgyzstan: Administrative Divisions and Transportation System, 1996

ELEVATED TO THE STATUS of a union republic by Joseph V. Stalin in 1936, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic was until 1990 one of the poorest, quietest, and most conservative of all the Soviet republics. It was the Kyrgyz Republic that celebrated the election of a shepherd as president of its parliamentary executive committee, the Presidium, in 1987. Three years later, however, that quiescence ended, and Kyrgyzstan's history as a separate nation began.

Kyrgyzstan began the new phase of its existence by declaring independence in August 1991. At that point, it possessed a combination of useful resources and threatening deficiencies. Geographic location fits in both categories; landlocked deep inside the Asian continent, Kyrgyzstan has minimal natural transportation routes available to serve its economic development, and its isolation has been an obstacle in the campaign to gain international attention. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan also is isolated from most of the Asian trouble spots (excepting Tajikistan), making national security a relatively low priority. The natural resources that Kyrgyzstan possesses—primarily gold, other minerals, and abundant hydroelectric power—have not been managed well enough to make them an asset in pulling the republic up from the severe economic shock of leaving the secure, if limiting, domain of the Soviet Union.

In the mid-1990s, the most ambitious economic and political reform program in Central Asia caused more frustration than satisfaction among Kyrgyzstan's citizens, largely because the republic inherited neither an economic infrastructure nor a political tradition upon which to base the rapid transitions envisioned by President Askar Akayev's first idealistic blueprints. Although some elements of reform (privatization, for example) went into place quickly, the absence of others (credit from a commercial banking system, for example) brought the overall system to a halt, causing high unemployment and frustration. By 1995, democratic reform seemed a victim of that frustration, as Akayev increasingly sought to use personal executive power in promoting his policies for economic growth, a pattern that became typical in the Central Asian countries' first years of independence.

Since independence Kyrgyzstan has made impressive strides in some regards such as creating genuinely free news media



and fostering an active political opposition. At the same time, the grim realities of the country's economic position, which exacerbate the clan- and family-based political tensions that have always remained beneath the surface of national life, leave long-term political and economic prospects clouded at best. Kyrgyzstan has no desire to return to Russian control, yet economic necessity has forced the government to look to Moscow for needed financial support and trade.

## **Historical Background**

The modern nation of Kyrgyzstan is based on a civilization of nomadic tribes who moved across the eastern and northern sections of present-day Central Asia. In this process, they were dominated by, and intermixed with, a number of other tribes and peoples that have influenced the ultimate character of the Kyrgyz people.

### **Early History**

Stone implements found in the Tian Shan mountains indicate the presence of human society in what is now Kyrgyzstan as many as 200,000 to 300,000 years ago. The first written records of a Kyrgyz civilization appear in Chinese chronicles beginning about 2000 B.C. The Kyrgyz, a nomadic people, originally inhabited an area of present-day northwestern Mongolia. In the fourth and third centuries B.C., Kyrgyz bands were among the raiders who persistently invaded Chinese territory and stimulated the building of the original Great Wall of China in the third century B.C. The Kyrgyz achieved a reputation as great fighters and traders. In the centuries that followed, some Kyrgyz tribes freed themselves from domination by the Huns by moving northward into the Yenisey and Baikal regions of present-day south-central Siberia.

The first Kyrgyz state, the Kyrgyz Khanate, existed from the sixth until the thirteenth century A.D., expanding by the tenth century southwestward to the eastern and northern regions of present-day Kyrgyzstan and westward to the headwaters of the Ertis (Irtysh) River in present-day eastern Kazakhstan. In this period, the khanate established intensive commercial contacts in China, Tibet, Central Asia, and Persia.

In the meantime, beginning about 1000 B.C., large tribes collectively known as the Scythians also lived in the area of present-day Kyrgyzstan. Excellent warriors, the Scythian tribes

farther west had resisted an invasion by the troops of Alexander the Great in 328–27 B.C. The Kyrgyz tribes who entered the region around the sixth century played a major role in the development of feudalism.

The Kyrgyz reached their greatest expansion by conquering the Uygur Khanate and forcing it out of Mongolia in A.D. 840, then moving as far south as the Tian Shan range—a position the Kyrgyz maintained for about 200 years. By the twelfth century, however, Kyrgyz domination had shrunk to the region of the Sayan Mountains, northwest of present-day Mongolia, and the Altay Range on the present-day border of China and Mongolia. In the same period, other Kyrgyz tribes were moving across a wide area of Central Asia and mingling with other ethnic groups (see *Ethnic Traditions*, this ch.).

### **Mongol Domination**

The Mongols' invasion of Central Asia in the fourteenth century devastated the territory of Kyrgyzstan, costing its people their independence and their written language. The son of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, Dzhuchi, conquered the Kyrgyz tribes of the Yenisey region, who by this time had become disunited. For the next 200 years, the Kyrgyz remained under the Golden Horde and the Oriot and Jumgar khanates that succeeded that regime. Freedom was regained in 1510, but Kyrgyz tribes were overrun in the seventeenth century by the Kalmyks, in the mid-eighteenth century by the Manchus, and in the early nineteenth century by the Uzbeks.

The Kyrgyz began efforts to gain protection from more powerful neighboring states in 1758, when some tribes sent emissaries to China. A similar mission went to the Russian Empire in 1785. Between 1710 and 1876, the Kyrgyz were ruled by the Uzbek Quqon (Kokand) Khanate, one of the three major principalities of Central Asia during that period (see fig. 3). Kyrgyz tribes fought and lost four wars against the Uzbeks of Quqon between 1845 and 1873. The defeats strengthened the Kyrgyz willingness to seek Russian protection. Even during this period, however, the Kyrgyz occupied important positions in the social and administrative structures of the khanate, and they maintained special military units that continued their earlier tradition of military organization; some Kyrgyz advanced to the position of khan.

## **Russian Control**

In 1876 Russian troops defeated the Quqon Khanate and occupied northern Kyrgyzstan. Within five years, all Kyrgyzstan had become part of the Russian Empire, and the Kyrgyz slowly began to integrate themselves into the economic and political life of Russia. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Russian and Ukrainian settlers moved into the northern part of present-day Kyrgyzstan. Russian specialists began large-scale housing, mining, and road construction projects and the construction of schools. In the first years of the twentieth century, the presence of the Russians made possible the publication of the first books in the Kyrgyz language; the first Kyrgyz reader was published in Russia in 1911. Nevertheless, Russian policy did not aim at educating the population; most Kyrgyz remained illiterate, and in most regions traditional life continued largely as it had before 1870.

By 1915, however, even many Central Asians outside the intelligentsia had recognized the negative effects of the Russian Empire's repressive policies. The Kyrgyz nomads suffered especially from confiscation of their land for Russian and Ukrainian settlements. Russian taxation, forced labor, and price policies all targeted the indigenous population and raised discontent and regional tension. The Kyrgyz in Semirech'ye Province suffered especially from land appropriation. The bloody rebellion of the summer of 1916 began in Uzbekistan, then spread into Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere. Kazaks, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz participated. An estimated 2,000 Slavic settlers and even more local people were killed, and the harsh Russian reprisals drove one-third of the Kyrgyz population into China.

## **Into the Soviet Union**

Following a brief period of independence after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution (see Glossary) toppled the empire, the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan was designated the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region and a constituent part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union) in 1924. In 1926 the official name changed to the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic before the region achieved the status of a full republic of the Soviet Union in 1936.

## Recent History

In the late 1980s, the Kyrgyz were jolted into a state of national consciousness by the reforms of Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev and by ethnic conflict much closer to home. As democratic activism stirred in Kyrgyzstan's cities, events in Moscow pushed the republic toward unavoidable independence.

### *Ethnic Conflict*

The most important single event leading to independence grew from an outburst of ethnic friction. From the perspective of the Kyrgyz, the most acute nationality problem long had been posed by the Uzbeks living in and around the city of Osh, in the republic's southwest. Although Kyrgyzstan was only about 13 percent Uzbek according to the 1989 census, almost the entire Uzbek population was concentrated in Osh Province. Tensions very likely had existed between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks throughout the Soviet period, but Moscow was able to preserve the image of Soviet ethnic harmony until the reforms of Gorbachev in the mid-1980s. In the general atmosphere of *glasnost* (see Glossary), an Uzbek-rights group called Adalat began airing old grievances in 1989, demanding that Moscow grant local Uzbek autonomy in Osh and consider its annexation by nearby Uzbekistan.

The real issue behind Adalat's demand was land, which is in extremely short supply in the southernmost province of Osh. To protect their claims, some Osh Kyrgyz also had formed an opposing ethnic association, called Osh-aimagy (Osh-land). In early June 1990, the Kyrgyz-dominated Osh City Council announced plans to build a cotton processing plant on a parcel of land under the control of an Uzbek-dominated collective farm in Osh Province.

The confrontation that erupted over control of that land brought several days of bloody riots between crowds led by the respective associations, killing at least 320 Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh. The precise cause and sequence of events in early June 1990 is disputed between Uzbek and Kyrgyz accounts. Scores of families were left homeless when their houses were burned out. The government finally stopped the rioting by imposing a military curfew.

Because the telephone lines remained open in the otherwise blockaded city, news of the violence spread immediately to Frunze. In the capital, a large group of students marched on the headquarters of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzia (CPK),

which also served as the seat of government, in the center of the city. In the violent confrontation that ensued, personal injuries were minimized by effective crowd control, and the riotous crowd eventually was transformed into a mass meeting.

### *Democratic Activism*

The Osh riots and the subsequent events in Frunze quickly brought to the surface an undercurrent of political discontent that had been forming among both the intelligentsia and middle-level party officials. A loose affiliation of activists calling themselves the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK) began to organize public opinion, calling among other things for the resignation of Absamat Masaliyev, who was president of the republic's parliament, the Supreme Soviet, as well as a member of the Soviet Union's Politburo and the head of the CPK. The DDK called for Masaliyev's resignation because he was widely viewed as having mishandled the Osh riots.

Democratic activists erected tents in front of the party headquarters, maintaining pressure with a series of hunger strikes and highly visible public demonstrations. The continuing atmosphere of crisis emboldened CPK members, who also wished to get rid of the reactionary Masaliyev. Four months later, in a presidential election prescribed by Gorbachev's reform policies, Masaliyev failed to win the majority of Supreme Soviet votes required to remain in power.

### *The Rise of Akayev*

With none of the three presidential candidates able to gain the necessary majority in the 1990 election, the Supreme Soviet unexpectedly selected Askar Akayev, a forty-six-year-old physicist, who had been serving as head of the republic's Academy of Sciences. Although he had served for a year in a science-related post on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and was a party member, Akayev was the first president of a Soviet republic who had not held a high party position.

At the same meeting of the Supreme Soviet, the deputies changed the name of the republic to Kyrgyzstan. They also began to speak seriously of seeking greater national sovereignty (which was formally declared on November 20, 1990) and of attaining political domination of the republic by the Kyrgyz, including the establishment of Kyrgyz as the official language.

By mid-summer 1991, the Kyrgyz were beginning to make serious moves to uncouple the government from the CPSU and its Kyrgyzstan branch. In early August, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, which governs the police and the internal security forces, announced a ban of all CPSU affiliation or activity within the ministry. Events elsewhere precluded a seemingly inevitable conflict with Moscow over that decision; in August 1991, the attention of the entire union moved to Moscow when reactionaries in Gorbachev's government attempted to remove him from power.

Unlike the leaders of the other four Central Asian republics, who temporized for a day about their course following the coup, Akayev condemned the plot almost immediately and began preparations to repel the airborne forces rumored to be on the way to Kyrgyzstan from Moscow. The quick collapse of the coup made the preparations unnecessary, but Akayev's declaration of support for Gorbachev and for the maintenance of legitimate authority gained the Kyrgyz leader enormous respect among the Kyrgyz people and among world leaders. On August 30, 1991, days after the coup began, Akayev and the republic's Supreme Soviet declared Kyrgyzstan an independent nation, and the president threw the CPSU and its Kyrgyzstan branch out of the government. However, he did not go as far as officials in most of the other former Soviet republics, where the party was banned totally.

At the same time independence was declared, the republic's Supreme Soviet scheduled direct presidential elections for October 1991. Running unopposed, Akayev received 95 percent of the popular vote, thus becoming the country's first popularly elected president. The so-called Silk Revolution drew much international sympathy and attention. In December 1991, when the Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian republics signed the Tashkent Agreement, forming a commonwealth that heralded the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Akayev demanded that another meeting be held so that Kyrgyzstan might become a founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS—see Glossary), as the new union was to be called.

The sympathy that Akayev had won for Kyrgyzstan earlier in his presidency served the country well once the world generally acknowledged the passing of the Gorbachev regime and the Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan was recognized almost immediately by most nations, including the United States, whose secretary

of state, James Baker, made an official visit in January 1992. A United States embassy was opened in the capital (which had reassumed its pre-Soviet name of Bishkek in December 1990) in February 1992. By early 1993, the new country had been recognized by 120 nations and had diplomatic relations with sixty-one of them.

### *Akayev's Early Years*

Despite initial euphoria over the possibilities of independence and membership in the CIS, Akayev recognized that his country's economic position was extremely vulnerable and that the ethnic situation exacerbated that vulnerability. Thus, the Akayev administration devoted much attention to creating a legal basis of governance while struggling to keep the economy afloat.

In the first two years of his presidency, Akayev seemed to work effectively with the Supreme Soviet that had put him in office. By 1992, however, Akayev's good relations with the legislature had fallen victim to the rapidly declining economy, the failure of the CIS to become a functioning body, and the country's inability to attract substantial assistance or investment from any of the potential foreign partners whom he had courted so assiduously.

In advancing his reform programs, Akayev experienced particular difficulties in gaining the cooperation of entrenched local politicians remaining from the communist government apparatus. To gain control of local administration, Akayev imitated the 1992 strategy of Russia's president Boris N. Yeltsin by appointing individuals to leadership positions at the province, district, and city levels (see *Structure of Government*, this ch.). Akayev filled about seventy such positions, the occupants of which were supposed to combine direct loyalty and responsibility to the president with a zeal to improve conditions for their immediate locales. The system became a source of constant scandal and embarrassment for Akayev, however. The most flagrant abuses came in Jalal-Abad Province (which had been split from neighboring Osh in spring 1991 to dilute political power in the south), where the new *akim*, the provincial governor, appointed members of his own family to the majority of the positions under his control and used state funds to acquire personal property. The situation in Jalal-Abad aroused strong resentment and demonstrations that continued even after the governor had been forced to resign.

In 1992 and 1993, the public perception grew that Akayev himself had provided a model for the tendency of local leaders to put family and clan interests above those of the nation. Indeed, several prominent national government officials, including the head of the internal security agency, the heads of the national bank and the national radio administration, the minister of foreign affairs, and the ambassador to Russia, came from Akayev's home area and from Talas, the home district of his wife.

Akayev's loss of momentum was reflected in the debate over the national constitution, a first draft of which was passed by the Supreme Soviet in December 1992. Although draft versions had begun to circulate as early as the summer of 1992, the commission itself agreed on a definitive version only after prolonged debate. An umbrella group of opposition figures from the DDK also began drawing up constitutional proposals in 1992, two variations of which they put forward for public consideration.

Although broad agreement existed on the outlines of the constitution, several specific points were difficult to resolve. One concerned the status of religion. Although it was agreed that the state would be secular, there was strong pressure for some constitutional recognition of the primacy of Islam. Another much-debated issue was the role of the Russian language. Kyrgyz had been declared the official state language, but non-Kyrgyz citizens exerted pressure to have Russian assigned near-equal status, as was the case in neighboring Kazakhstan, where Russian had been declared the "official language of interethnic communication." The issue of property ownership was warmly debated, with strong sentiment expressed against permitting land to be owned or sold. Another important question was the role of the president within the new state structure.

The proposed constitution was supposed to be debated by the full Supreme Soviet (as the new nation's parliament continued to call itself after independence) and by a specially convened body of prominent citizens before its acceptance as law. However, some members of the democratic opposition argued that a special assembly of Kyrgyz elders, called a *kuraltai*, should be convened to consider the document. A final draft of the constitution was passed by the Supreme Soviet in May 1993, apparently without involvement of a *kuraltai*.



In drafting a final document, the Supreme Soviet addressed some of the most controversial issues that had arisen in pre-draft discussions. Specific passages dealt with transfer and ownership of property, the role of religion in the government, the powers of the president, and the official language of the country (see Constitution, this ch.).

Akayev had spoken of the need to have a presidential system of government—and, indeed, the constitution sets the presidency outside the three branches of government, to act as a sort of overseer ensuring the smooth functioning of all three. However, by the mid-1990s dissatisfaction with the strong presidential model of government and with the president himself was growing. With economic resources diminished, political infighting became commonplace. Although the prime minister and others received blame for controversial or unsuccessful policy initiatives, President Akayev nonetheless found himself increasingly isolated politically amid growing opposition forces.

Although the "democratic" opposition that had helped bring Akayev to power had grown disenchanted, its constituent factions were unable to exert serious pressure on the president because they could not agree on ideology or strategy. In October 1992, the main democratic opposition party Erk (Freedom) fractured into two new parties, Erkin and Ata-Meken (Fatherland). More serious opposition originated within the ranks of the former communist elite. Some of this opposition came directly from the ranks of the reconstituted and still legal CPK (see Political Parties, this ch.).

In January 1993, Akayev made an unusually harsh statement to the effect that he had been misled by his economic advisers and that Kyrgyzstan's overtures to the outside world had only raised false hopes. The continuing outflow of ethnic Russians (who constitute the greater part of Kyrgyzstan's technicians), the war in Tajikistan (which has driven refugees and "freedom fighters" into Kyrgyzstan), the growing evidence of wide-scale official corruption and incompetence, rising crime, and—more than anything else—the spectacular collapse of the economy increasingly charged the country's political atmosphere in the first half of the 1990s.

## **Physical Environment**

The smallest of the newly independent Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan is about the same size as the state of Nebraska, with

a total area of about 198,500 square kilometers. The national territory extends about 900 kilometers from east to west and 410 kilometers from north to south. Kyrgyzstan is bordered on the southeast by China, on the north and west by Kazakstan, and on the south and west by Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. One consequence of the Stalinist division of Central Asia into five republics is that many ethnic Kyrgyz do not live in Kyrgyzstan. Three enclaves, legally part of the territory of Kyrgyzstan but geographically removed by several kilometers, have been established, two in Uzbekistan and one in Tajikistan (see fig. 8). The terrain of Kyrgyzstan is dominated by the Tian Shan and Pamir mountain systems, which together occupy about 65 percent of the national territory. The Alay range portion of the Tian-Shan system dominates the southwestern crescent of the country, and, to the east, the main Tian Shan range runs along the boundary between southern Kyrgyzstan and China before extending farther east into China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Kyrgyzstan's average elevation is 2,750 meters, ranging from 7,439 meters at Pik Pobedy (Mount Victory) to 394 meters in the Fergana Valley near Osh. Almost 90 percent of the country lies more than 1,500 meters above sea level.

### **Topography and Drainage**

The mountains of Kyrgyzstan are geologically young, so that the physical terrain is marked by sharply uplifted peaks separated by deep valleys (see fig. 9). There is also considerable glaciation. Kyrgyzstan's 6,500 distinct glaciers are estimated to hold about 650 billion cubic meters of water. Only around the Chu, Talas, and Fergana valleys is there relatively flat land suitable for large-scale agriculture.

Because the high peaks function as moisture catchers, Kyrgyzstan is relatively well watered by the streams that descend from them. None of the rivers of Kyrgyzstan are navigable, however. The majority are small, rapid, runoff streams. Most of Kyrgyzstan's rivers are tributaries of the Syrdariya, which has its headwaters in the western Tian Shan along the Chinese border. Another large runoff system forms the Chu River, which arises in northern Kyrgyzstan, then flows northwest and disappears into the deserts of southern Kazakstan. Ysyk-Köl is the second largest body of water in Central Asia, after the Aral Sea, but the saline lake has been shrinking steadily, and its mineral content has been rising gradually. Kyrgyzstan has a total of about 2,000 lakes with a total surface area of 7,000 square kilometers,

mostly located at altitudes of 3,000 to 4,000 meters. Only the largest three, however, occupy more than 500 square kilometers. The second- and third-largest lakes, Songköl and Chatyr-Köl (the latter of which also is saline), are located in the Naryn Basin.

Natural disasters have been frequent and varied. Overgrazing and deforestation of steep mountain slopes have increased the occurrence of mudslides and avalanches, which occasionally have swallowed entire villages. In August 1992, a severe earthquake left several thousand people homeless in the southwestern city of Jalal-Abad.

### **Climate**

The country's climate is influenced chiefly by the mountains, Kyrgyzstan's position near the middle of the Eurasian landmass, and the absence of any body of water large enough to influence weather patterns. Those factors create a distinctly continental climate that has significant local variations. Although the mountains tend to collect clouds and block sunlight (reducing some narrow valleys at certain times of year to no more than three or four hours of sunlight per day), the country is generally sunny, receiving as much as 2,900 hours of sunlight per year in some areas. The same conditions also affect temperatures, which can vary significantly from place to place. In January the warmest average temperature ( $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) occurs around the southern city of Osh, and around Ysyk-Köl. The latter, which has a volume of 1,738 cubic kilometers, does not freeze in winter. Indeed, its name means "hot lake" in Kyrgyz. The coldest temperatures are in mountain valleys. There, readings can fall to  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  or lower; the record is  $-53.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The average temperature for July similarly varies from  $27^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the Fergana Valley, where the record high is  $44^{\circ}\text{C}$ , to a low of  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  on the highest mountain peaks. Precipitation varies from 2,000 millimeters per year in the mountains above the Fergana Valley to less than 100 millimeters per year on the west bank of Ysyk-Köl.

### **Environmental Problems**

Kyrgyzstan has been spared many of the enormous environmental problems faced by its Central Asian neighbors, primarily because its designated roles in the Soviet system involved neither heavy industry nor large-scale cotton production. Also, the economic downturn of the early 1990s reduced some of the





Figure 9. Kyrgyzstan: Topography

more serious effects of industrial and agricultural policy. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan has serious problems because of inefficient use and pollution of water resources, land degradation, and improper agricultural practices.

### ***Water Resources***

Although Kyrgyzstan has abundant water running through it, its water supply is determined by a post-Soviet sharing agreement among the five Central Asian republics. As in the Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan has the right to 25 percent of the water that originates in its territory, but the new agreement allows Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan unlimited use of the water that flows into them from Kyrgyzstan, with no compensation for the nation at the source. Kyrgyzstan uses the entire amount to which the agreement entitles it, but utilization is skewed heavily in favor of agricultural irrigation. In 1994 agriculture accounted for about 88 percent of total water consumption, compared with 8 percent by industry and 4 percent by municipal water distribution systems. According to World Bank (see Glossary) experts, Kyrgyzstan has an adequate supply of high-quality water for future use, provided the resource is prudently managed.

Irrigation is extremely wasteful of water because the distribution infrastructure is old and poorly maintained. In 1993 only an estimated 5 percent of required maintenance expenditures was allocated. Overall, an estimated 70 percent of the nation's water supply network is in need of repair or replacement. The quality of drinking water from this aging system is poorly monitored—the water management staff has been cut drastically because of inadequate funds. Further, there is no money to buy new water disinfection equipment when it is needed. Some aquifers near industrial and mining centers have been contaminated by heavy metals, oils, and sanitary wastes. In addition, many localities rely on surface sources, making users vulnerable to agricultural runoff and livestock waste, which seep gradually downward from the surface. The areas of lowest water quality are the heavily populated regions of the Chu Valley and Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, and areas along the rivers flowing into Ysyk-Köl.

In towns, wastewater collection provides about 70 percent of the water supply. Although towns have biological treatment equipment, as much as 50 percent of such equipment is rated as ineffective. The major sources of toxic waste in the water

supply are the mercury mining combine at Haidarkan; the antimony mine at Kadamzai; the Kadzyi Sai uranium mine, which ceased extraction in 1967 but which continues to leach toxic materials into nearby Ysyk Köl; the Kara-Balta Uranium Recovery Plant; the Min Kush deposit of mine tailings; and the Kyrgyz Mining and Metallurgy Plant at Orlovka.

### *Land Management*

The most important problems in land use are soil erosion and salinization in improperly irrigated farmland. An estimated 60 percent of Kyrgyzstan's land is affected by topsoil loss, and 6 percent by salinization, both problems with more serious long-term than short-term effects. In 1994 the size of livestock herds averaged twice the carrying capacity of pasturage land, continuing the serious overgrazing problem and consequent soil erosion that began when the herds were at their peak in the late 1980s (see Agriculture, this ch.). Uncertain land tenure and overall financial insecurity have caused many private farmers to concentrate their capital in the traditional form—livestock—thus subjecting new land to the overgrazing problem.

The inherent land shortage in Kyrgyzstan is exacerbated by the flooding of agricultural areas for hydroelectric projects. The creation of Toktogol Reservoir on the Naryn River, for example, involved the flooding of 13,000 hectares of fertile land. Such projects have the additional effect of constricting downstream water supply; Toktogol deprives the lower reaches of the Syrdariya in Uzbekistan and the Aral Sea Basin of substantial amounts of water. Because the Naryn Basin, where many hydroelectric projects are located, is very active seismically, flooding is also a danger should a dam be broken by an earthquake. Several plants are now in operation in zones where Richter Scale readings may reach eleven.

### *The Aral Sea*

In response to the internationally recognized environmental crisis of the rapid desiccation of the Aral Sea, the five states sharing the Aral Sea Basin (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) are developing a strategy to end the crisis. The World Bank and agencies of the United Nations (UN) have developed an Aral Sea Program, the first stage of which is funded by the five countries and external donors. That stage has seven areas of focus, one of which—

land and water management in the upper watersheds—is of primary concern to Kyrgyzstan. Among the conditions detrimental to the Aral Sea's environment are erosion from deforestation and overgrazing, contamination from poorly managed irrigation systems, and uncontrolled waste from mining and municipal effluents. Kyrgyzstan's National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) has addressed these problems as part of its first-phase priorities in cooperation with the Aral Sea Program.

### *Environmental Policy Making*

The NEAP, adopted in 1994, is the basic blueprint for environmental protection. The plan focuses on solving a small number of critical problems, collecting reliable information to aid in that process, and integrating environmental measures with economic and social development strategy. The initial planning period is to end in 1997. The main targets of that phase are inefficient water resource management, land degradation, overexploitation of forest reserves, loss of biodiversity, and pollution from inefficient mining and refining practices.

Because of severe budget constraints, most of the funds for NEAP operations come from international sources, including official institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank and numerous international nongovernmental organizations. Implementation is guided by a committee of state ministers and by a NEAP Expert Working Group, both established in 1994 by executive order. A NEAP office in Bishkek was set up with funds from Switzerland.

The main environmental protection agency of the Kyrgyzstani government is the State Committee on Environmental Protection, still known by its Soviet-era acronym, Goskompriroda. Established by the old regime in 1988, the agency's post-Soviet responsibilities have been described in a series of decrees beginning in 1991. In 1994 the state committee had a central office in Bishkek, one branch in each of the seven provinces, and a total staff of about 150 persons. Because of poorly defined lines of responsibility, administrative conflicts often occur between local and national authorities of Goskompriroda and between Goskompriroda and a second national agency, the Hydrometeorological Administration (Gidromet), which is the main monitoring agency for air, water, and soil quality. In general, the vertical hierarchy structure, a relic of Soviet times, has led to poor coordination and duplication of effort among environmental protection agencies.



## **Population**

The population of Kyrgyzstan is divided among three main groups: the indigenous Kyrgyz, the Russians who remained after the end of the Soviet Union, and a large and concentrated Uzbek population. Topography divides the population into two main segments, the north and the south. Each has differing cultural and economic patterns and different predominant ethnic groups.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

The censuses of 1979 and 1989 indicated annual population growth of a little over 2 percent, with a birth rate of 30.4 per 1,000 in 1989. The estimated birth rate in 1994 was twenty-six per 1,000, the death rate seven per 1,000, with a rate of natural increase of 1.9 percent (see table 2, Appendix). In 1993 average life expectancy was estimated at sixty-two years for males, seventy years for females—the second lowest rate among the former Soviet republics. In 1993 the infant mortality rate was estimated at 47.8 deaths per 1,000 live births. Early marriage and large family size have combined to make Kyrgyzstan's population a relatively young one. In 1989, some 39.5 percent of the population was below working age, and only 10.1 percent was of pension age. The 1989 census indicated that only about 38 percent of the country's population was urbanized (see table 3, Appendix).

### **Ethnic Groups**

In 1993 the population of Kyrgyzstan was estimated at 4.46 million, of whom 56.5 percent were ethnic Kyrgyz, 18.8 percent were Russians, 12.9 percent were Uzbeks, 2.1 percent were Ukrainians, and 1.0 percent were Germans (see table 4, Appendix). The rest of the population was composed of about eighty other nationalities. Of some potential political significance are the Uygurs. That group numbers only about 36,000 in Kyrgyzstan, but about 185,000 live in neighboring Kazakstan. The Uygurs are also the majority population in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China, whose population is about 15 million, located to the northeast of Kyrgyzstan. In November 1992, the Uygurs in Kyrgyzstan attempted to form a party calling for establishment of an independent Uygurstan that also would include the Chinese-controlled Uygur territory. The Ministry of Justice denied the group legal registration.

Between 1989 and 1993, a significant number of non-Kyrgyz citizens left the republic, although no census was taken in the early 1990s to quantify the resulting balances among ethnic groups. A considerable portion of this exodus consisted of Germans repatriating to Germany, more than 8,000 of whom left in 1992 alone. According to reports, more than 30,000 Russians left the Bishkek area in the early 1990s, presumably for destinations outside Kyrgyzstan. In 1992 and 1993, refugees from the civil war in Tajikistan moved into southern Kyrgyzstan. In 1989 about 64,000 Kyrgyz were living in Tajikistan, and about 175,000 were living in Uzbekistan. Reliable estimates of how many of these people subsequently returned to Kyrgyzstan have not been available.

The Fergana Valley, which eastern Kyrgyzstan shares with Central Asian neighbors Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, is one of the most densely populated and agriculturally most heavily exploited regions in Central Asia. As such, it has been the point of bitter contention among the three adjoining states, both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Members of the various ethnic groups who have inhabited the valley for centuries have managed to get along largely because they occupy slightly different economic niches. The sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks traditionally have farmed lower-lying irrigated land while the nomadic Kyrgyz have herded in the mountains. However, the potential for ethnic conflict is ever present. Because the borders of the three countries zigzag without evident regard for the nationality of the people living in the valley, many residents harbor strong irredentist feelings, believing that they should more properly be citizens of a different country. Few Europeans live in the Fergana Valley, but about 552,000 Uzbeks, almost the entire population of that people in Kyrgyzstan, reside there in crowded proximity with about 1.2 million Kyrgyz.

### **Geographic Factors**

Population statistics depict only part of the demographic situation in Kyrgyzstan. Because of the country's mountainous terrain, population tends to be concentrated in relatively small areas in the north and south, each of which contains about two million people. About two-thirds of the total population live in the Fergana, Talas, and Chu valleys. As might be expected, imbalances in population distribution lead to extreme contrasts in how people live and work. In the north, the Chu Valley,

site of Bishkek, the capital, is the major economic center, producing about 45 percent of the nation's gross national product (GNP—see Glossary). The Chu Valley also is where most of the country's Europeans live, mainly because of economic opportunities. The ancestors of today's Russian and German population began to move into the fertile valley to farm at the end of the nineteenth century. There was a subsequent influx of Russians during World War II, when industrial resources and personnel were moved en masse out of European Russia to prevent their capture by the invading Germans. In the era of Soviet First Secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev, a deliberate development policy brought another in-migration. Bishkek is slightly more than 50 percent Kyrgyz, and the rest of the valley retains approximately that ethnic ratio. In the mid-1990s, observers expected that balance to change quickly, however, as Europeans continued to move out while rural Kyrgyz moved in, settling in the numerous shantytowns springing up around Bishkek. The direct distance from Bishkek in the far north to Osh in the southwest is slightly more than 300 kilometers, but the mountain road connecting those cities requires a drive of more than ten hours in summer conditions; in winter the high mountain passes are often closed. In the Soviet period, most travel between north and south was by airplane, but fuel shortages that began after independence have greatly limited the number of flights, increasing a tendency toward separation of north and south (see *Topography and Drainage; Transportation and Telecommunications*, this ch.).

The separation of the north and the south is clearly visible in the cultural mores of the two regions, although both are dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz. Society in the Fergana Valley is much more traditional than in the Chu Valley, and the practice of Islam is more pervasive. The people of the Chu Valley are closely integrated with Kazakhstan (Bishkek is but four hours by car from Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan). The people of the south are more oriented, by location and by culture, to Uzbekistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and the other Muslim countries to the south.

Geographical isolation also has meant that the northern and southern Kyrgyz have developed fairly distinct lifestyles. Those in the north tend to be nomadic herders; those in the south have acquired more of the sedentary agricultural ways of their Uygur, Uzbek, and Tajik neighbors. Both groups came to accept Islam late, but practice in the north tends to be much

less influenced by Islamic doctrine and reflects considerable influence from pre-Islamic animist beliefs. The southerners have a more solid basis of religious knowledge and practice. It is they who pushed for a greater religious element in the 1993 constitution (see Religion, this ch.).

## **Society and Culture**

The ethnic identity of the Kyrgyz has been strongly linked to their language and to ethnic traditions, both of which have been guarded with particular zeal once independence provided an opportunity to make national policy on these matters. Less formally, the Kyrgyz people have maintained with unusual single-mindedness many elements of social structure and a sense of their common past. The name Kyrgyz derives from the Turkic *kyrk* plus *yz*, a combination meaning "forty clans."

### **Language**

In the period after A.D. 840, the Kyrgyz joined other Turkic groups in an overall Turkification pattern extending across the Tian Shan into the Tarim River basin, east of present-day Kyrgyzstan's border with China. In this process, which lasted for more than two centuries, the Kyrgyz tribes became mixed with other tribes, thoroughly absorbing Turkic cultural and linguistic characteristics.

The forebears of the present-day Kyrgyz are believed to have been either southern Samoyed or Yeniseyan tribes. Those tribes came into contact with Turkic culture after they conquered the Uygurs and settled the Orkhon area, site of the oldest recorded Turkic language, in the ninth century (see Early History, this ch.). If descended from the Samoyed tribes of Siberia, the Kyrgyz would have spoken a language in the Uralic linguistic subfamily when they arrived in Orkhon; if descended from Yeniseyan tribes, they would have descended from a people of the same name who began to move into the area of present-day Kyrgyzstan from the Yenisey River region of central Siberia in the tenth century, after the Kyrgyz conquest of the Uygurs to the east in the preceding century. Ethnographers dispute the Yeniseyan origin, however, because of the very close cultural and linguistic connections between the Kyrgyz and the Kazaks (see Early Tribal Movement; Ethnic Groups, ch. 1).

In the period of tsarist administration (1876–1917), the Kazaks and the Kyrgyz both were called Kyrgyz, with what are

now the Kyrgyz subdenominated when necessary as Kara-Kyrgyz (black Kyrgyz). Although the Kyrgyz language has more Mongolian and Altaic elements than does Kazak, the modern forms of the two languages are very similar. As they exist today, both are part of the Nogai group of the Kipchak division of the Turkic languages, which belong to the Uralic-Altaic language family. The modern Kyrgyz language did not have a written form until 1923, at which time an Arabic-based alphabet was used. That was changed to a Latin-based alphabet in 1928 and to a Cyrillic-based one in 1940. In the years immediately following independence, another change of alphabet was discussed, but the issue does not seem to generate the same passions in Kyrgyzstan that it does in other former Soviet republics (see National Identity, ch. 1; Culture and the Arts, ch. 3; The Spoken Language, ch. 4; The Written Language, ch. 4; Language and Literature, ch. 5).

One important difference between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is that the Kyrgyz people's mastery of their own language is almost universal, whereas the linguistic phase of national identity is not as clear in the much larger area and population of Kazakhstan (see Language, ch. 1). As in Kazakhstan, mastery of the "titular" language among the resident Europeans of Kyrgyzstan is very rare. In the early 1990s, the Akayev government pursued an aggressive policy of introducing Kyrgyz as the official language, forcing the remaining European population to use Kyrgyz in most public situations. Public pressure to enforce this change was sufficiently strong that a Russian member of President Akayev's staff created a public scandal in 1992 by threatening to resign to dramatize the pressure for "Kyrgyzzification" of the non-native population. A 1992 law called for the conduct of all public business to be converted fully to Kyrgyz by 1997. But in March 1996, Kyrgyzstan's parliament adopted a resolution making Russian an official state language alongside Kyrgyz and marking a reversal of earlier sentiment. Substantial pressure from Russia was a strong factor in this change, which was part of a general rapprochement with Russia urged by Akayev.

### **Ethnic Traditions**

The Kyrgyz also have retained a strong sense of cultural tradition. Figures from the 1989 Soviet census show that Kyrgyz males were the least likely of the men of any Soviet nationality to marry outside their people (only 6.1 percent of their mar-



*Falconer wearing traditional kalpak (hat) and coat  
Kalmyk woman baking little breads in traditional adobe oven  
Courtesy Hermine Dreyfuss*

riages were "international") and that Kyrgyz women did so in only 5.8 percent of marriages. Moreover, although the degree of such changes is difficult to measure, Kyrgyz "mixed" marriages seem uncommonly likely to assimilate in the direction of a Kyrgyz identity, with the non-Kyrgyz spouse learning the Kyrgyz language and the children assuming the Kyrgyz nationality. Even ordinary citizens are thoroughly familiar with the Kyrgyz oral epic, *Manas*, a poem of several hundred thousand lines (many versions are recited) telling of the eponymous Kyrgyz hero's struggles against invaders from the east. Many places and things in Kyrgyzstan, including the main airport, bear the name of this ancient hero, the one-thousandth anniversary of whose mythical adventures were cause for great national celebration in 1995.

## **Social Structure**

The age-old geographic separation of pockets of the Kyrgyz population has tended to reinforce conservatism in all of the country's society. The modern Kyrgyz still apply great significance to family and clan origins. The majority of Kyrgyz continued a nomadic lifestyle until the Soviet campaigns of forcible collectivization forced them first into transitional settlements and then into cities and towns or state and collective farms in the 1930s. Within the centralized farm systems, however, many Kyrgyz continued to move seasonally with their herds. There has been strong resistance to industrial employment.

### ***Clans***

Kyrgyz identity in public and private life is said to be determined primarily by membership in one of three clan groupings known as "wings" (right, or *ong*; left, or *sol*; and *ichkilik*, which is neither) and secondarily by membership in a particular clan within a wing. The history of this grouping is unknown, although several legends explain the phenomenon. The left wing now includes seven clans in the north and west. Each of the seven has a dominant characteristic, and all have fought each other for influence. The Buguu warrior clan provided the first administrators of the Kyrgyz Republic under the Soviet Union; when the purges of Stalin eradicated their leaders in the 1930s, their place was taken by a second northern warrior clan, the Sarybagysh, who have provided most Kyrgyz leaders since that time, including Akayev. The right wing contains only one clan, the Adygine. Located in the south, the Adygine are

considered the most genuinely Kyrgyz clan because of their legendary heritage. The southern Ichkilik is a group of many clans, some of which are not of Kyrgyz origin, but all of which claim Kyrgyz identity in the present.

Acutely aware of the roles each of the clans traditionally has played, the Kyrgyz are still very conscious of clan membership in competing for social and economic advantage. Support for fellow clan members is especially strong in the northern provinces. Kyrgyz men frequently wear traditional black-on-white felt headgear, which informs others of their clan status and the degree of respect to be accorded them. Larger clans are subdivided by origin and by the nobility of their ancestors; although there is no prohibition of advancement for those of non-noble descent, descent from a high-born extended family still is considered a social advantage.

Like other Central Asian groups, the Kyrgyz venerate history and see themselves as part of a long flow of events. A traditional requirement is the ability to name all the people in the previous seven generations of one's family. Clan identity extends this tradition even further, to the legendary origins of the Kyrgyz people. Kyrgyz clans are said to spring from "first fathers," most of whom appear in both oral legends and in history. Clan history and genealogy are entrusted to tribal elders, whose ongoing knowledge of those subjects makes falsification of lineage difficult. Because clan identity remains an important element of social status, however, Kyrgyz do sometimes claim to have descended from a higher branch of their clan than is actually the case.

### *Domestic Life*

The Kyrgyz are classified as nomadic pastoralists, meaning that they traditionally have herded sheep, horses, or yaks, following the animals up and down the mountains as the seasons change. The basic dwelling is the yurt, a cylindrical felt tent easily disassembled and mounted on a camel or horse. The image of a yurt's circular smoke opening is the central design of Kyrgyzstan's flag. Various parts of the yurt have ritual significance. Because the herding economy continues in many parts of the country, the yurt remains a strong symbol of national identity. Families living in Western-style dwellings erect yurts to celebrate weddings and funerals.

Traditional domestic life centers on the flocks. The diet of the nomads is limited to mutton and noodles; fruit and vegeta-



bles are rare even in today's Kyrgyz cuisine. The most traditional dishes are *besh barmak*, a mutton stew, and roast lamb. For ceremonial meals, the lamb is killed without spilling its blood, and the head is served to the guest of honor, who slices portions of the eyes and ears and presents them to other guests to improve their sight and hearing. Horsemeat is eaten fresh and in sausages. Traditional beverages are *kumys*, fermented mare's milk, and two varieties of beer.

Family traditions continue to demonstrate the patriarchal and feudal character of a nomadic people. Family relations are characterized by great respect for older family members and the dominance of male heads of households. Traditional celebrations of special events retain the markings of religious and magical rites. For example, the cutting of a child's umbilical cord is celebrated with elaborate consumption of food and humorous games. The naming of a child and the cutting of the child's hair are conducted in such a way as to appease supernatural forces. The full observance of the most important family event, the wedding celebration, requires considerable expense that relatively few Kyrgyz can afford: payment for a bride, dowry, animal sacrifice, and an exchange of clothing between the relatives of the bride and the groom.

### ***The Role of Women***

In traditional Kyrgyz society, women had assigned roles, although only the religious elite sequestered women as was done in other Muslim societies. Because of the demands of the nomadic economy, women worked as virtual equals with men, having responsibility for chores such as milking as well as child-rearing and the preparation and storage of food. In the ordinary family, women enjoyed approximately equal status with their husbands. Kyrgyz oral literature includes the story of Janyl-myrza, a young woman who led her tribe to liberation from the enemy when no man in the tribe could do so. In the nineteenth century, the wife of Khan Almyr-bek led a group of Kyrgyz tribes at the time of the Russian conquest of Quqon.

In modern times, especially in the first years of independence, women have played more prominent roles in Kyrgyzstan than elsewhere in Central Asia. Since 1991 women have occupied the positions of state procurator (the top law enforcement official in the national government), minister of education, ambassador to the United States and Canada, and minister of foreign affairs. Women have also excelled in banking and busi-

ness, and the editor of Central Asia's most independent newspaper, *Respublika*, is a woman. Roza Otunbayeva, who was minister of foreign affairs in 1996, has been mentioned frequently as a successor to Akayev.

## Contemporary Culture

As the capital of a Soviet republic, Bishkek (which until 1990 had been named Frunze after the Soviet general who led the military conquest of the Basmachi rebels in the mid-1920s) was endowed with the standard cultural facilities, including an opera, ballet, several theater companies, and an orchestra, as well as a Lenin museum, national art and craft museums, and an open-air sculpture museum. Since independence, funding for those institutions has decreased dramatically, and the cultural facilities have also been hard hit by the departure of local Russians. It also is unclear whether younger Kyrgyz will continue their parents' substantial interest in classical music, which in the Soviet era led several generations to support the national orchestra.

In the Soviet-directed propagation of "all-union culture," Kyrgyz actors, directors, and dancers achieved fame throughout the Soviet Union. Chingiz Aitmatov, the republic's most prominent writer, became one of the best-known and most independent artists in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The Kyrgyz film industry, which had been very productive while supported by Soviet government funds, essentially vanished after 1991. Film projects that survive, such as a large-scale production on the life of Chinggis Khan directed by noted Kyrgyz director T. Okeyev, do so through foreign financing (an Italian film company has supported production of the Okeyev film).

Perhaps the best indicator of the condition of the fine arts in postcommunist Kyrgyzstan is the fate of the open-air sculpture museum in Bishkek, which began suffering a series of thefts in early 1993. Because the targets were all bronze, presumably the sculptures were stolen for their value as metal, not as art. When a large statuary group commemorating Aitmatov's Ysyk-Köl Forum (a notable product of the early *glasnost* period) disappeared, the museum's remaining statues were removed to a more secure location.

## Religion

The vast majority of today's Kyrgyz are Muslims of the Sunni

(see Glossary) branch, but Islam came late and fairly superficially to the area. Kyrgyz Muslims generally practice their religion in a specific way influenced by earlier tribal customs. The practice of Islam also differs in the northern and southern regions of the country. Kyrgyzstan remained a secular state after the fall of communism, which had only superficial influence on religious practice when Kyrgyzstan was a Soviet republic. Most of the Russian population of Kyrgyzstan is atheist or Russian Orthodox. The Uzbeks, who make up 12.9 percent of the population, are generally Sunni Muslims.

### **The Introduction of Islam**

Islam was introduced to the Kyrgyz tribes between the ninth and twelfth centuries. The most intense exposure to Islam occurred in the seventeenth century, when the Jungars drove the Kyrgyz of the Tian Shan region into the Fergana Valley, whose population was totally Islamic. However, as the danger from the Jungars subsided and Kyrgyz groups returned to their previous region, the influence of Islam became weaker. When the Quqon Khanate conquered the territory of the Kyrgyz in the eighteenth century, the nomadic Kyrgyz remained aloof from the official Islamic practices of that regime. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, most of the Kyrgyz population had been converted to at least a superficial recognition of Islamic practice.

### **Tribal Religion**

Alongside Islam the Kyrgyz tribes also practiced totemism, the recognition of spiritual kinship with a particular type of animal. Under this belief system, which predated their contact with Islam, Kyrgyz tribes adopted reindeer, camels, snakes, owls, and bears as objects of worship. The sun, moon, and stars also played an important religious role. The strong dependence of the nomads on the forces of nature reinforced such connections and fostered belief in shamanism (the power of tribal healers and magicians with mystical connections to the spirit world) and black magic as well. Traces of such beliefs remain in the religious practice of many of today's Kyrgyz.

Knowledge of and interest in Islam are said to be much stronger in the south, especially around Osh, than farther north. Religious practice in the north is more heavily mixed with animism (belief that every animate and inanimate object



*Gate leading to prayer house on  
Suleyman's Mountain, Osh  
Courtesy Lisa Batey*



*New mosque under  
construction, Naryn  
Courtesy Rurie E. Miller*

contains a spirit) and shamanist practices, giving worship there a resemblance to Siberian religious practice.

### **Islam and the State**

Religion has not played an especially large role in the politics of Kyrgyzstan, although more traditional elements of society urged that the Muslim heritage of the country be acknowledged in the preamble to the 1993 constitution. That document mandates a secular state, forbidding the intrusion of any ideology or religion in the conduct of state business. As in other parts of Central Asia, non-Central Asians have been concerned about the potential of a fundamentalist Islamic revolution that would emulate Iran and Afghanistan by bringing Islam directly into the making of state policy, to the detriment of the non-Islamic population. Because of sensitivity about the economic consequences of a continued outflow of Russians, President Akayev has taken particular pains to reassure the non-Kyrgyz that no Islamic revolution threatens (see Ethnic Groups, this ch.). Akayev has paid public visits to Bishkek's

main Russian Orthodox church and directed 1 million rubles from the state treasury toward that faith's church-building fund. He has also appropriated funds and other support for a German cultural center. The state officially recognizes Orthodox Christmas (but not Easter) as a holiday, while also noting two Muslim feast days, Oroz ait (which ends Ramadan) and Kurban ait (June 13, the Day of Remembrance), and Muslim New Year, which falls on the vernal equinox.

## **Education**

In the mid-1990s, much of the Soviet-era education system remained in Kyrgyzstan, which had made a conscientious effort to educate all of its citizens before 1991 and continued to do so after that date. Substantial structural and curriculum changes were underway by 1995, however. The 1993 constitution continues the Soviet guarantee of free basic education at state institutions to all citizens; education is compulsory through grade nine. Free education at the vocational, secondary specialized, and higher levels also continues to be offered by the state to qualified individuals. The fundamentals of post-Soviet education policy were enumerated in the 1992 law on education, which established the Ministry of Education as the central administrative body of the national system. Although Soviet-era statistics indicated that 100 percent of the people between the ages of nine and forty-nine were literate, the actual literacy rate probably is somewhat less.

### **Education System**

Once independence was achieved, the Ministry of Education began working energetically to revamp the old Soviet course of study. The ministry is responsible for developing curriculum, setting national standards and educational policy, developing certification examinations, and awarding degrees. The ministry is divided into departments for general education, higher education, and material support. Below the ministry level, the education hierarchy includes the six provinces and the separate city of Bishkek, representatives from each of which provide input to the ministry on local conditions. The level of basic local administration is the district (*rayon*), where the district education officer hires faculty and appoints school inspectors and methodology specialists.



*Kindergarten for children of government officials, Bishkek  
Courtesy Hermine Dreyfuss*

General education is financed from district budgets, and the college preparatory and higher education programs are financed by the national budget. For the former category of expenditures, school principals negotiate their requirements with district officials, but the central government sets norms based on previous expenditures and on the relative resources of the provinces. In the last years of the Soviet period, Kyrgyzstani schools had a surplus of money, but available funds declined sharply beginning in 1992. Since that time, insufficient funds in local budgets have forced the Ministry of Education to make special requests for support from the Ministry of Economics and Finance.

### **Instruction**

General education traditionally has been accessible to nearly all children in Kyrgyzstan. In primary and secondary grades,

about 51 percent of students are female; that number increases to 55 percent in higher education, with a converse majority of males in vocational programs. There is little difference in school attendance between urban and rural areas or among the provinces. Higher education, however, has been much more available to the urban and more wealthy segments of the population. Because of a shortage of schools, 37 percent of general education students attend schools operating in two or three shifts. Construction of new facilities has lagged behind enrollment growth, the rate of which has been nearly 3 percent per year.

In line with the reform of 1992, children start school at age six and are required to complete grade nine. The general education program has three stages: grades one through four, grades five through nine, and grades ten and eleven. Students completing grade nine may continue into advanced or specialized (college preparatory) secondary curricula or into a technical and vocational program. The school year is thirty-four weeks long, extending from the beginning of September until the end of May. The instruction week is twenty-five hours long for grades one through four and thirty-two hours for grades five through eleven. In 1992 about 960,000 students were enrolled in general education courses, 42,000 in specialized secondary programs, 49,000 in vocational programs, and 58,000 in institutions of higher education. About 1,800 schools were in operation in 1992. That year Kyrgyzstan's state system had about 65,000 teachers, but an estimated 8,000 teachers resigned in 1992 alone because of poor salaries and a heavy work load that included double shifts for many. Emigration also has depleted the teaching staff. In 1993 the national pupil-teacher ratio for grades one through eleven was 14.4 to 1, slightly higher in rural areas, and considerably higher in the primary grades. The city of Bishkek, however, had a ratio of almost 19 to 1.

## **Curriculum**

Post-Soviet curriculum reform has aroused much controversy in Kyrgyzstan. A fundamental question is the language of instruction, which has become increasingly Kyrgyz as non-indigenous citizens leave the country and textbooks in Kyrgyz slowly become available. The Ministry of Education has held competitions, supported by foreign donations, for the design of new textbooks in Kyrgyz. Until 1992 textbook production

and distribution were inefficient and costly aspects of the education system. By the mid-1990s, the single, state-supported publisher of textbooks had gradually improved the quality and availability of its products. In 1992 the first major curriculum reform provided for mandatory foreign language study (English, French, or German) beginning in grade one; computer science courses in grades eight through eleven (a program hampered by lack of funds); and the replacement of Soviet ideology with concepts of market economy and ethnic studies. The reformed curriculum requirements also leave room for elective courses, and instructional innovation is encouraged.

### **Higher Education**

In 1994 Kyrgyzstan had twenty-six institutions of higher learning, all but seven of which were located in Bishkek. Seven of the institutions were private and the remainder state-funded. Approximately 4,700 faculty were employed there, of which only 150 had doctoral degrees and 1,715 were candidates, the step below the doctorate in the Soviet system. The language of instruction remained predominantly Russian in the mid-1990s, although the use of Kyrgyz increased yearly. Long-term plans call for a more Western style of university study, so that, for example, the universities would begin to offer a baccalaureate degree. In 1992 President Akayev created a Slavic University in Bishkek to help Kyrgyzstan retain its population of educated Russians, for whom the increased "Kyrgyzzification" of education was a reason to emigrate. Because Russian students from outside the Russian Federation had lost their Soviet-era right to free education in Russian universities, Akayev hoped to provide a Russian-language institution for Russian-speaking students from all the Central Asian states. The shortage of education funds in Kyrgyzstan brought strong objections to a project that did not promote the education of ethnic Kyrgyz students, however.

### **Health and Welfare**

In 1993 the World Bank reported that the population of Kyrgyzstan enjoyed better health care than most other countries with similar per capita income, which averaged US\$3,410 per year for Kyrgyzstan's category in 1992. The current health conditions and health prospects of Kyrgyzstan's population are dif-



ficult to calculate, however, because of the sudden change that independence visited upon the medical community. Until 1991 Kyrgyzstan's medical system was financed through the Soviet Union's Ministry of Health, which guaranteed a health establishment equal to that of other Soviet republics. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the slow collapse of fiscal ties between Kyrgyzstan and Moscow, the medical community has inherited an aging but generally adequate physical plant. However, the system often lacks the vaccines, medicines, and other resources needed to maintain the health of the population.

### **Health Care System**

Kyrgyzstan inherited the Soviet system of free universal health care, which in Kyrgyzstan's case generally provided sufficient numbers of doctors, nurses, and doctor's assistants, as well as medical clinics and hospitals. However, since 1991 citizens often have received inadequate care because medical personnel are not well trained; pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and equipment are insufficient; and facilities are generally inadequate and unsanitary.

In 1991 Kyrgyzstan had 15,354 doctors, or 34.2 per 10,000 people. Paramedical workers totaled 42,448, or 94.6 per 10,000 people. Some 588 outpatient clinics were in operation, averaging 139 hours of patient visits per eight-hour shift. In addition, 246 general and twenty specialized hospitals were in operation; nearly one-third of all hospitals were located in Osh Province (which also had about one-third of the country's total population). By contrast, the capital city, Bishkek, had the fewest hospital facilities per capita of all regions, providing 1.55 general hospitals per 100,000 population. Like other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan has continued the Soviet practice of state enterprises having their own clinics and sanatoriums. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan's residents lost the right to free treatment in the hospitals of other former republics, making unavailable many types of specialized treatment that the Soviet system had apportioned among adjacent republics.

Very few truly private health facilities have developed in the early post-Soviet period, and those that exist face very high licensing fees. Although it is illegal for state employees in the health field to diversify their activity into private practice, by 1993 many health workers were accepting unreported payments for providing additional treatment. In 1992 the maxi-



*Patient in specialized cardiac hospital, Bishkek  
Courtesy Hermine Dreyfuss*

mum salary of a medical specialist such as a surgeon was only about 18 percent higher than the maximum salary of a technician or laboratory worker. Under such conditions, the rising cost of living in 1992 and 1993 forced many doctors to leave medicine for higher salaries in other professions.

Kyrgyzstan produces no vaccines of its own and almost no medicines or other pharmaceuticals. Drug availability is substantially higher at regional facilities than at smaller ones, but items such as antihistamines, insulin, antiseptics, vaccines, and some narcotics are either extremely scarce or extremely expensive. The other former Soviet republics now demand payment in United States dollars, which Kyrgyzstan does not have, for medical supplies. Because of the scarcity of vaccines, there is a greatly increased likelihood of epidemics of diseases such as diphtheria and measles. An outbreak of measles in Bishkek in early 1993 was said to be just below epidemic level. It has become common practice in hospitals and clinics to require

patients to provide their own medicines for operations and other medical procedures. Because virtually the only available medicines are those for sale in the public bazaars, quality is questionable, and accidental poisonings caused by misuse and spoilage have been reported.

Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet financial crisis has reduced government support of the Soviet-era health system, forcing government planners to formulate an ambitious health care delivery reform program. The center of the program is a transformation of the national health system into a system of public health insurance, in which compulsory employer fees and a health insurance tax on employees would support care for employees, and state contributions would support care for unemployed citizens. All employed citizens would be required to carry health insurance. All care providers would switch from the salary basis of the old system to a fee-for-service payment system. Because the banking, record-keeping, and tax systems of the country are not ready to support such a nationwide program, however, installation has lagged far behind the original timetable, which called for a pilot program in Bishkek in 1993.

### **Health Conditions**

The main causes of adult deaths in Kyrgyzstan are, in order of occurrence, cardiovascular conditions, respiratory infections, and accidents (see table 5, Appendix). Sexually transmitted diseases reportedly are very low in incidence; only five cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) were recorded in 1992. In the early 1990s, major health hazards have been posed by growing shortages of chlorine to purify water supplies and the increasing danger of typhus outbreaks resulting from the closure of most of the country's public baths. In 1993 Kyrgyzstan suffered increasing cases of hepatitis and gastrointestinal infections, especially in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalal-Abad. The cause of such infections is believed to be the use of open water supplies contaminated by livestock and improper disposal of waste (see Environmental Problems, this ch.). Although adults traditionally consume most of their water in the form of boiled tea, children have greater access to untreated water and foods.

Additional stress is placed on the population by the rising cost of food, which has reduced the quality and quantity of most people's diets. In 1993 meat consumption was reported to have dropped by 20 percent since 1990, intake of milk prod-

ucts by 30 percent, and consumption of fish (which was imported in the Soviet period) by 70 percent. The average caloric intake was reported to have decreased by about 12 percent since 1990. There are also frequent reports of deaths or injuries caused by tainted or falsely labeled food and drink, particularly alcoholic beverages, which are widely sold by extra-legal private concerns. The rising cost of energy has meant insufficient heat for many apartments and public buildings. Naryn Province, the coldest and most remote part of the country, has been particularly affected. In that region, many buildings lack central heating, and residents have been forced to devise homemade stoves vented directly out the windows. In addition, the availability and range of ambulance services have been restricted severely by fuel shortages.

## **Social Welfare**

Like the other former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan inherited a social welfare system that allocated benefits very broadly without targeting needy groups in society. In this system, nearly half of society received some sort of benefit, and many benefit payments were excessive. By necessity, the post-Soviet government has sought to make substantial reductions in state social protection payments, emphasizing identification of the most vulnerable members of society.

### ***The Soviet Heritage***

In 1991, the last year of the Soviet Union, the payment of pensions, child allowances, and other forms of support amounted to 18 percent of the Kyrgyz Republic's gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary). At that point, about 600,000 pensioners and 1.6 million children received some form of payment. Eligibility requirements were extremely liberal, defined mainly by age and work history rather than by social position or contributions to a pension fund. This generous system failed to eliminate poverty, however; according to a 1989 Soviet survey, 35 percent of the population fell below the official income line for "poorly supplied" members of society. Thus poverty, which became an increasingly urgent problem during the economic decline of the transition period of the early 1990s, already was rooted firmly in Kyrgyzstan when independence was achieved.

### ***Reforming Social Welfare***

The Akayev government addressed the overpayment prob-

lem by reducing categorical subsidies and government price controls; by indexing benefits only partially as inflation raised the cost of living; and by targeting benefits to the most needy parts of society. Under the new program, child allowances went only to people with incomes below a fixed level, and bread price compensation went only to groups such as pensioners who lacked earning power. By 1993 such measures had cut government welfare expenses by more than half, from 57 percent of the state budget to 25 percent.

Nevertheless, the percentage of citizens below the poverty line grew rapidly in the early 1990s as the population felt the impact of the government's economic stabilization program (see *Economic Reform*, this ch.). In addition, the Soviet system delegated delivery of many social services, including health, to state enterprises, which in the post-Soviet era no longer had the means to guarantee services to employees (or, in many cases, even to continue employing them). The state's Pension Fund (a government agency with the relatively independent status of a state committee) went into debt in 1994 because workers who retired early or worked only for a short period remained eligible for pensions and the poor financial state of enterprises made revenue collection difficult. The pension system is supported by payroll taxes of 33 percent on industries and 26 percent on collective and state farms. Besides retirement pensions, disability and survivors' benefits also are paid. Of the amount collected, 14 percent goes to the labor unions' Social Insurance Fund and the remainder to the Pension Fund. The standard pension eligibility age is sixty for men and fifty-five for women, but in 1992 an estimated 156,000 people were receiving benefits at earlier ages. In 1994 the minimum pension amount was raised to forty-five som (for value of the som—see *Glossary*) per month, the latest in a long series of adjustments that did not nearly keep pace with inflation's impact on the real value of the pension.

New pension legislation prepared in 1994 made enterprises responsible for the costs of early retirement; established a five-year minimum for pension eligibility; clearly separated the categories of work pensions from social assistance payments; abolished supplementary pension payments for recipients needing additional support; eliminated the possibility of receiving a pension while continuing to work (the position of an estimated 49,000 workers in 1992); and provided for long-term linkage of contributions made to pensions later received.

Child allowances are paid for children up to the age of eighteen, and a lump sum payment is made on the birth of a child. In 1991 child allowances consumed 6.7 percent of GDP; since that time, targeting of benefits has been a major concern in this category to reduce spending but cover vulnerable groups. The first alteration of eligibility standards occurred in 1993. Cash for this category is provided by direct transfers from the state budget combined with Pension Fund contributions.

Besides pensions and family allowances, Kyrgyzstani citizens also receive maternity benefits and sick pay covered by the Social Insurance Fund, which is managed by the Federation of Independent Labor Unions and the individual unions; it receives money only from its 14 percent share of payroll taxes, not from the state budget or individual contributions. All public and private employees are eligible for sick leave, with payments depending on length of service. The maternity allowance is a single payment equal to two months' minimum wage. World Bank experts consider the sick and maternity benefits excessive in relation to the state of the economy and the state budget.

In assessing the future of social assistance in Kyrgyzstan, experts predict that economic restructuring through the 1990s will increase the number of citizens requiring assistance from the state system. To meet such needs, thorough reform of the system—aimed mainly at tightening eligibility standards—will be necessary. It is also expected that Kyrgyzstan will require other methods of social assistance to provide for individuals who do not fall into existing categories, or for whom inflation erodes excessively the value of payments now received. The officially and unofficially unemployed (together estimated at 300,000 at the end of 1994) are an especially vulnerable group because of the unlikelihood of workers being reabsorbed rapidly into the country's faltering economy. (Unemployment benefits are paid for twenty-six weeks to those who register, but the number of "non-participants" is much greater than the number of registered unemployed.)

## **The Economy**

In the first five years of independence, Kyrgyzstan's economy made more progress in market-oriented reform legislation but less progress in economic growth than the other four Central Asian states. This disparity was largely because Kyrgyzstan lacked the diversified natural resources and processing infra-

structure that enable a national economy to survive the shut-down of some sectors by shifting labor and other inputs to new areas of production.

The economic system of Kyrgyzstan is undergoing a slow, painful, and uncertain transition. Once a highly integrated provider of raw materials for the centrally controlled economy of the Soviet Union, the republic's economy is reorienting itself toward processing its own raw materials and producing its own industrial products. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, industry accounted for only about one-third of the country's net material product (NMP—see Glossary) while employing less than one-fifth of the labor force. The primary emphasis of the economy remained agriculture, which accounted for about 40 percent of NMP and officially employed about one-third of the labor force. The transportation and communications sector employed only about 3.2 percent of the labor force in 1991. As in other Soviet republics, the vast majority of workers were employed by the state, while most of the remainder worked on private agricultural plots.

### **Role in the Soviet Economy**

As part of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan played a small but highly integrated role in the centrally controlled economy. Figures for 1990 show that agriculturally the republic contributed 1 percent or less of the total Soviet output of preserved vegetables, animal fats, plant oils, and meat, and 3 percent of the total Soviet output of beet sugar. Kyrgyzstan also produced small proportions of Soviet wine products and tobacco. Industrially, the republic supplied 1 to 2 percent of the Soviet Union's total output of cotton cloth, silk cloth, linen, and woolen cloth, and an equal proportion of ready-made clothing and shoes. Machine-assembly plants, steel plants, motor-assembly plants, and miscellaneous light industry contributed another 1 percent or less of the Soviet total. The only energy resources that Kyrgyzstan contributed in any volume were coal (0.5 percent of the Soviet total) and hydroelectric power (0.8 percent). Kyrgyzstan's radio-assembly and other electronic plants accounted for a small portion of the defense industry. A torpedo-assembly plant was located on the shores of Ysyk-Köl. One of the Soviet Union's two military airbases for the training of foreign pilots was located outside Bishkek.

Kyrgyzstan's largest role in the Soviet economy was as a supplier of minerals, especially antimony (in which the republic

had a near monopoly), mercury, lead, and zinc. Of greatest significance economically, however, was gold, of which Kyrgyzstan was the Soviet Union's third-largest supplier.

### **Natural Resources**

Soviet geologists have estimated Kyrgyzstan's coal reserves at about 27 billion tons, of which the majority remained entirely unexploited in the mid-1990s. About 3 billion tons of that amount are judged to be of highest quality. This coal has proven difficult to exploit, however, because most of it is in small deposits deep in the mountains. Kyrgyzstan also has oil resources; small deposits of oil-bearing shale have been located in southern Kyrgyzstan, and part of the Fergana oil and natural gas complex lies in Kyrgyzstani territory. In the Osh region, four pools of oil, four of natural gas, and four mixed pools have been exploited since the 1950s; however, the yield of all of them is falling in the 1990s. In 1992 their combined output was 112,000 tons of oil and 65 million cubic meters of natural gas, compared with the republic's annual consumption of 2.5 million tons of oil and 3 billion cubic meters of natural gas.

Kyrgyzstan's iron ore deposits are estimated at 5 billion tons, most containing about 30 percent iron. Copper deposits in the mountains are located in extremely complex mineral deposits, making extraction costly. The northern mountains also contain lead, zinc, molybdenum, vanadium, and bismuth. The south has deposits of bauxite and mercury; Kyrgyzstan was the Soviet Union's main supplier of mercury, but in the 1990s plummeting mercury prices have damaged the international market. A tin and tungsten mine was 80 percent complete in 1995. Kyrgyzstan had a virtual monopoly on supplying antimony to the Soviet Union, but post-Soviet international markets are small and highly specialized. Uranium, which was in high demand for the Soviet Union's military and atomic energy programs, no longer is mined in Kyrgyzstan.

The Soviet Union's largest gold mine was located at Makmal in Kyrgyzstan, and in the Soviet period Kyrgyzstan's 170 proven deposits put it in third place behind only Russia and Uzbekistan in gold production in the union. Two more promising deposits, at Kumtor and Jerui, have been discovered. Kumtor, said to be the seventh-largest gold deposit in the world with an estimated value of US\$5.5 billion, is being explored by the Canadian Metals Company (Cameco), a uranium company, in a joint-venture operation. Gold deposits are concentrated in



Talas Province in north-central Kyrgyzstan, where as much as 200 tons may exist; deposits in Makmal are estimated at sixty tons. Deposits adjacent to the Chatkal River in the northwest amount to an estimated 150 tons.

The terms of the agreement for Kumtor exploitation with Cameco, which gains one-third of profits from gold extraction, caused public concern in 1992. To improve control of the mineral-extraction and refining processes, and to address the uncontrolled movement of precious metals out of the country, President Akayev created a new administrative agency, Kyrgyzaltyn (Kyrgyzstan Gold), to replace Yuzhpolmetal, the Soviet-era body responsible for precious metals. In January 1993, Akayev also brought the country's antimony and mercury mines into Kyrgyzaltyn. The latter are especially important because mercury is used to refine gold. Control of the mercury mines makes more likely the realization of Akayev's hope that Kyrgyzstan will become more than just a supplier of raw materials.

Although Kyrgyzstan has one of the largest proven gold reserves in the world, in the early 1990s fuel and spare parts shortages combined with political disputes to hamper output (see *Government and Politics*, this ch.). Production in 1994 was 3.5 tons, but the output goal for 1996 was ten tons.

Kyrgyzstan's major energy source, water, has also been discussed as a commercial product. The export of bottled mineral and fresh water was the object of several unrealized plans in the mid-1990s.

## **Agriculture**

The condition of agriculture in Kyrgyzstan is determined by the state's continuing control of production, marketing, and prices, as well as by the republic-wide specialization mandated by the former Soviet Union to promote interdependence among the republics. Most agricultural production continues to occur in the state farm and collective farm systems, which are slowly being privatized. In the early post-Soviet years, government policy encouraged self-sufficiency in cereal grains to provide food security. Maintaining such self-sufficiency, however, has entailed continued government regulation such as compulsory marketing, which in turn has discouraged the development of diversified farm enterprise. The main agricultural regions are in the Fergana Valley (Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces), in the northern Chu and Talas valleys, and in the

Ysyk-Köl basin in the northeast. In the early 1990s, income declined steadily in both state-run and privatized agricultural enterprises.

### *Agricultural Land*

Kyrgyzstan has about 1.4 million hectares of arable land, which is only about 7 percent of the nation's total area. More than 70 percent of the arable area depends on irrigation for its productivity. In the Soviet period, only about 4 percent of agricultural land was owned privately, although private plots contributed a much higher percentage of overall output, especially in fruits and vegetables. In 1994 only an additional 6 percent of agricultural land had passed to some form of private ownership. The privatization of land was a difficult issue that was contested between President Akayev and more conservative government officials. The latter reflected the Soviet-era view that land should be common property protected and disposed of only by the state. More immediately, these officials represented the interests of state farm administrators, whose enterprises suffered greatly from post-Soviet economic shocks and redistribution of resources.

In 1992 and 1993, the land redistribution program also was hindered by poor cooperation between the national and local governments and by lack of clarity in the program outline. Nevertheless, by early 1993 some 165 of the 470 existing state and collective farms had been reorganized or privatized into about 17,000 peasant enterprises, cooperatives, or peasant associations. However, the state retained control over vital agricultural inputs and market distribution channels, meaning that private land users often lacked material support and that price controls limited the profitability of private farms. The privatization program was halted in early 1993, and a more comprehensive reform program was developed. In early 1995, the government offered debt relief to state and collective farms that expedited the availability of land to private farmers.

According to privatization law, state agricultural assets are distributed according to a share system in which all citizens have the right to a garden plot, but only individuals in the rural population have the right to occupy land and other agricultural assets formerly owned by state and collective farms. Recipients of shares can maintain the property as part of the collective, transfer it to a cooperative, or establish an individual farm. In the early 1990s, the former alternative was much more

popular because of the perception that larger units offered greater security in a time of financial uncertainty. Private ownership of land remained illegal in 1995, but use rights are guaranteed for forty-nine years, and use rights can be bought, sold, and used as collateral for loans. In 1994 a new decree on land reform expanded and clarified the legal basis for the use and exchange of land and improved the administration of land privatization, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

### ***Agricultural Production***

In the post-Soviet years, Kyrgyzstan has continued to emphasize production of raw materials for industrial processing, a role assigned to the republic in the Soviet system. An estimated 62 percent of the population is rural (see Population, this ch.). The chief crops are fodder crops, wheat, barley, and cotton. Other agricultural products are sugar beets, tobacco, fruit, vegetables, and silk (see table 13, Appendix). In 1994 the largest crop harvests were of wheat (611,000 tons), barley (300,000 tons), potatoes (288,000 tons), and tomatoes (160,000 tons).

The chief agricultural use of land is pasturage for livestock, mainly sheep, goats, and cattle, the tending of which is the traditional vocation of the Kyrgyz people. An estimated 83 percent of land in agricultural use is mountainous pastureland. In the 1980s, livestock production accounted for about 60 percent of the value of the country's agricultural output; such production included mutton, beef, eggs, milk, wool, and thoroughbred horses. In 1987, when herds reached their largest numbers, about twice as much grain was used for animal feed as for human consumption. However, the prices of and demand for livestock products have dropped significantly in the 1990s relative to those of crops. For this reason and because Soviet-era herds had been supported largely by cheap imported grain, in 1994 livestock contributed less than half the total value of Kyrgyzstan's agricultural earnings. In 1994 the most important livestock products were cow's milk (750,000 tons), beef and veal (70,000 tons), mutton and lamb (50,000 tons), eggs (30,600 tons), wool (56,300 tons), pork products (30,000 tons), and poultry meat (25,000 tons). All of those figures were below the totals for the previous two years.

### ***Agricultural Trends and Problems***

The early 1990s saw many farmers turn from commercial

production to subsistence crops, a trend that hurt the country's export activities (roughly half of its exports were agricultural in 1990) as well as the availability of foods within Kyrgyzstan. Experts believe that Kyrgyzstan's main agricultural problems are inappropriate and slow-moving reforms (especially land redistribution), intrusive bureaucratic regulations, poor availability of credit, and delayed payments to farmers for their crops. More immediately, both water and fertilizers have been in short supply since the end of the Soviet Union. In addition, Kyrgyzstan's agriculture uses an average of less than 50 percent of the amount of pesticides used by agriculture in the Western nations.

In 1994 the agriculture sector was in the fourth and most difficult year of a major decline that included reduced output, isolation from commercial markets, decreased earnings, and a deteriorating natural resource base (see table 6, Appendix). In 1994 total agricultural output dropped by 17 percent, and the decline in marketed and processed output was substantially greater because of the trend toward subsistence farming. Production ceased to increase at about the time of the collapse of the Soviet system, an event that initiated the loss of markets and trading partners, the loss of transfer payments from Moscow, and a condition of general monetary instability. The national government did not address these problems effectively in the first years of independence; in fact, government marketing quotas, price controls, and trade restrictions exacerbated the decline. By restricting farmers' marketing and pricing practices, the government in effect levied a tax on agriculture that redistributed income to other sectors of society. National reforms in land tenure, farm organization, and the financial system, together with privatization of services, were eroded by the continued authority of local officials to interfere in administration of those reforms.

A key agricultural resource, pastureland, was degraded severely by the Soviet-era practice of mandating livestock populations too large for available pasturage on state farms and by post-Soviet transfer of livestock from inefficient collective and state farms to private ownership without limiting grazing rights on common pastures. By 1994 over-grazing had led to serious erosion of much pasture land (see Environmental Problems, this ch.).

In 1994 a continuing controversy over granting central bank credits to support farmers during the growing season again

made financial support a dubious proposition. Without such support, planting and fertilization would be severely limited because farmers in many rural areas lack financial resources to buy seed and fertilizer. On the other hand, such credits have always been a threat to the government's overall economic program. For several reasons, including the state's failure to pay farmers on time for their crops, the agricultural sector's bank debts increased rapidly in the early 1990s. This situation was the basis of arguments that the government could not afford to pay agricultural credits.

## **Industry**

Industrial production in Kyrgyzstan declined significantly in 1992 and 1993, especially in comparison to the average annual growth rate from 1985 to 1990, which was 3.3 percent. Important factors in this decline were the energy crisis caused by the loss of Soviet-era fuel supply agreements and the outflow of skilled Russian industrial and management personnel. By 1994, when output had fallen by another 25 percent, Kyrgyzstan's production was only 42 percent of its 1990 level. Only four of the country's 200 most important industrial products—oil, electrical power, household electric appliances, and alcoholic beverages—showed an increased output in 1994. By the first quarter of 1995, some 120 enterprises, more than one-third of the national total, were idle. The decline was caused by problems in obtaining raw materials, components, and other inputs; a drop in effective demand; the economic weakness of trading partners; and problems in arranging for payments. An important additional problem, however, is the nature of Kyrgyzstan's Soviet-era industrial structure, which was specialized for defense-related manufacturing. Many defense-related industries closed in the early 1990s because they could not find alternative types of production once Soviet defense contracts ended. The government's initial policy was to avoid supporting unprofitable state enterprises, but intense political pressure has kept many such firms open.

Including mining, the electric power industries, and construction, industry contributed about 45 percent of GDP in 1991, but that percentage dropped significantly in the following years, even with a parallel agricultural decline. For example, between 1991 and 1993 production of crude steel decreased 45 percent, cement production decreased by 49 percent, and production of metal cutting machines dropped by 77

percent. Gross capital formation decreased an estimated 55 percent in 1994, and investment for that year was below 25 percent of the rate at the end of the Soviet period. Private investment, however, rose slightly to nearly half of total investment for 1994.

None of the major industrial projects planned for 1993–94 was completed on time. Included in major construction postponements was a cigarette factory in Osh, which could have taken advantage of southern Kyrgyzstan's favorable tobacco-growing conditions. Many other projects were completed on a much smaller scale than originally planned. As conversion to useful new lines of manufacture was delayed, the national economy shrank. In addition, unemployment grew rapidly as state-owned enterprises were phased out but not replaced.

In the mid-1990s, the most valuable industrial components of Kyrgyzstan's economy were machine building, textiles, and food processing, which are centered in Bishkek, Osh, and Jalal-Abad (see fig. 5; table 14, Appendix). Some electronics and instruments are produced in former defense plants, and a limited metallurgical industry also exists. The most productive "industry" is electric power, which is produced in the country's numerous hydroelectric plants.

## Energy

Unlike its neighbors Kazakstan and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan has no significant exploited reserves of oil or natural gas; in 1994 petroleum production was 88,000 tons, and natural gas production was 39 million cubic meters. Although substantial coal deposits are present, in the mid-1990s experts described Kyrgyzstan's coal industry as in a state of collapse. In the early 1990s, only four of the fourteen state-owned coal mines were considered economically viable, and little coal came from privately owned mines. Between 1991 and 1993, brown coal production decreased by 50 percent (to 959,000 tons), and black coal production decreased by 53 percent (to 712,000 tons). The domestic price of conventional fuels rose slightly above world levels after the much cheaper energy-sharing arrangements of the Soviet era ended. (In 1992 oil and gas import costs were 50 percent of the total state budget, compared with 10 percent in 1991.) In 1994 some 39 percent of Kyrgyzstan's total import expenditures went for the purchase of conventional fuels, contributing an estimated US\$100 million to the country's trade imbalance (see Foreign Trade, this ch.). Energy

consumption, meanwhile, has declined sharply since 1991, and experts do not expect it to return to its 1990 level.

Management of national energy and fuel policy is distributed among several ministries and other state agencies—an arrangement that has hindered efficient acquisition and distribution. Distribution of heat and electricity is the responsibility of the state-run Kyrgyzstan National Energy Holding Company, and natural gas purchases are managed by the Kyrgyzstan Natural Gas Administration (Kyrgyzgas). Oil, gas, and coal exploration is the responsibility of the State Geological Commission (Goskomgeologiya). Natural gas, provided by the Republic of Turkmenistan in the Soviet era, now comes mainly from neighboring Uzbekistan. Coal, used to heat households and to fuel some thermoelectric plants, is mainly received from Kazakstan in a barter arrangement for electrical power. Kazakstan's coal is preferred because the heaviest demand in Kyrgyzstan is concentrated in the north, and Kyrgyzstan's remaining coal mines are in the south, from which transportation is problematic.

For these reasons, existing thermoelectric stations have been deemphasized in the 1990s in favor of expanded hydroelectric production. Thus, in 1994 thermoelectric power production dropped by 46 percent while hydroelectric production rose by 30 percent. These statistics enabled the national energy sector to show a modest drop of 4 percent in total power generation in 1994, but district heating, which comes from coal- and gas-powered combined heat and power plants, suffered heavily from the transition. Meanwhile, government promotion of electricity brought an increase of 117 percent in household power use between 1991 and 1994, although overall household energy consumption declined by 36 percent during that period. Some aspects of the promotion plan have been criticized, including the large-scale promotion of electric heat in a country with poorly insulated houses.

Emphasis on electricity is backed by abundant water power, mainly from the country's location at the mountain headwaters of the Syrdariya, one of the two largest rivers in Central Asia. On the Naryn River, chief tributary of the Syrdariya, a series of hydroelectric stations has been built, the largest of which is the Kürp-Say Hydroelectric Plant, fed by the Toktogol Reservoir in central Kyrgyzstan. Other major hydroelectric plants are located at Atabashin, Alamedin, and Uchkorgon. Such stations have made possible the net export of electric power, worth an estimated US\$100 million in 1994. That figure was only about

*Construction work at Tash-Kumyr hydroelectric station  
Courtesy Hermine Dreyfuss*



half the value of Kyrgyzstan's 1990 export, however, because demand in neighboring republics dropped considerably in the early 1990s. The main customer is Kazakhstan, with which power is exchanged through the Central Asian Integrated System.

Only about 10 percent of Kyrgyzstan's hydroelectric power potential and only about 3 percent of the potential of its smaller streams are currently being exploited; the Naryn River is estimated to afford an additional 2,200 megawatts of easily accessible rated capacity. Meanwhile, the Fergana Valley, the only working oil field in the country, has remaining reserves of 14 million tons of oil that require expensive recovery technology. No serious oil exploration has been done elsewhere, although the Chu and Ak-Say valleys are believed to be promising.

### **Economic Reform**

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has undertaken significant structural reforms of its economy; in 1994 the International Monetary Fund (IMF—see Glossary) ranked Kyrgyzstan fourth among former Soviet republics (behind the three Baltic states) in the pace of economic reform, but positive results have not been forthcoming. As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, one of the most significant reforms is privatization. The goal of



privatization, a high priority in the early 1990s, has been to create new productive enterprises with efficient management systems while involving the population in the reform program at a fundamental level. The process began in December 1991 with the adoption of the Privatization and Denationalization Law and the creation of the State Property Fund as the agency to design and implement the program. In late 1992, a new parliamentary "Concept Note" reoriented the program toward rapid sale of small enterprises and ownership transition in larger enterprises by vouchers and other special payments. By the end of 1993, about 4,450 state enterprises, including 33 percent of total fixed enterprise assets, were fully or partially privatized. By mid-1994, nearly all services and 82 percent of assets in trade enterprises, 40 percent of assets in industry, and 68 percent of construction assets were in private hands.

However, the practical results of those statistics have not been nearly so positive. Most privatization (and almost all privatization in industry) was accomplished by creation of joint-stock companies, transferring enterprise shares to labor groups within them. Almost no public bidding for enterprise shares occurred, and the state maintained significant shares in enterprises after their conversion to joint-stock companies. Also, because the sale of shares was prohibited, shareholders wishing to leave the company had to return their holdings to the labor collective. The 1994 Law on Privatization remedied this situation by providing for competitive bidding for shares in small enterprises (with fewer than 100 employees) as well as long-term privatization of medium-sized (with 100 to 1,000 employees) and large enterprises by competitive cash bidding among individuals. The new law also provided for the auctioning of all enterprise shares remaining in state hands, over an undetermined period of time. In 1994 and early 1995, voucher privatization moved toward its goals quickly; by the end of 1994, an estimated 65 percent of industrial output came from non-state enterprises.

Privatization was not the final step in economic success, however. After that step, many firms needed drastic restructuring—most notably in management and technology—to function in a market environment. Because the commercial banking system had not been reformed substantially, enterprises found little financial or technical support for such upgrading (see Financial System, this ch.). On the other hand, enterprises (especially state enterprises) have not been discouraged from

defaulting on loans because they often are closely associated with banks, whose pliable loan policy is backed by the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan. Plans called for establishment of an intermediary agency to distribute foreign and international funds to privatized enterprises until the banking system is able to take over lending activities. A stock exchange opened in Bishkek in May 1995 and was considered an important step in expediting this process.

In the early years of independence, a major cause of Kyrgyzstan's economic distress has been corruption and malfeasance. In a January 1993 speech, President Akayev reported that as much as 70 percent of the money that the country had invested in its economy had been diverted into private hands. Meanwhile, a poll of the country's few entrepreneurs found that 85 percent of them reported having to offer bribes to stay in business. The truth of Akayev's statement was difficult to verify, but reports in newspapers and elsewhere suggest that it could be correct. Official data indicated that since independence at least 100,000 tons of cast iron, steel, aluminum, and zinc had been sold abroad without legal permission, and that a credit for 1.7 billion rubles for the purchase of grain had vanished. Other anecdotal evidence of corruption, often connected with local centers of political power, was plentiful (see *Structure of Government*, this ch.).

### **Financial System**

In mid-1995, the banking system continued to be dominated by the central savings bank (the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan, created in 1991) and by the three major commercial banks that succeeded the sectoral banks of the Soviet era and remained under state control. Those banks—the Agricultural and Industrial Bank (Agroprombank), the Industrial and Construction Bank (Promstroybank), and the Commercial Bank of Kyrgyzstan—owned 85 percent of banking assets in 1994. New commercial banks, of which fifteen were established in 1993 and 1994, were owned by individuals or enterprises and had much less financial power than the state-owned banks. The new commercial banks have the right to buy and sell foreign currency and open deposit accounts. The National Bank is the official center of currency exchange, but in the mid-1990s it did not adhere to official exchange rates. In mid-1994, the government established the Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which uses state funds, foreign currency assets, and loans

from abroad to aid small and medium-sized enterprises and to invest in targeted spheres of the economy, especially housing, construction, power generation, and agriculture.

The banking system has remained concentrated in the same areas as in the Soviet period. Although some diversification has occurred, loans tend to go to traditional clients. Because new commercial banks are small and initially were owned by state ministries and state-owned enterprises, competition has developed slowly. Through 1994 Soviet-style accounting and reporting systems remained in use, and banking services such as domestic and international payments have remained at the same noncompetitive level as they were prior to 1991. Capabilities vital to a market-type economy, such as credit risk assessment and project appraisal, are lacking. Post-Soviet regulations on capital funds, exposure limits, and lending practices have not been enforced. The technical infrastructure of the banks also requires substantial overhaul. In addition, the National Bank has been plagued by scandal; the first director, an Akayev protégé, was linked to several illegal financial operations in 1993 and 1994.

The limitations of the banking system have made it unable to efficiently mobilize and allocate financial resources into the national economy. This failure has hindered privatization and other types of economic reform that require substantial amounts of risk capital upon which borrowers can rely. Especially critical are the bad loans held by the three state-owned banks (influenced by government interference in loan decisions, together with poor financial discipline on the part of major enterprises) and eroded capital base. In 1995 the National Bank's outstanding loans to agricultural and industrial enterprises totaled 1 billion som each.

### **Prices, Monetary Policy, and Debt**

Kyrgyzstan paid dearly for its designated role as an exporter of raw materials when the Soviet Union unraveled and retail prices began to be freed: the prices paid for raw materials rose much more slowly than did prices of finished goods. Thus, in 1992, for example, the cost of what Kyrgyzstan imported rose by fifty to 100 times, while the amounts received for exports rose by fifteen to twenty times. This explains in part why the GNP for 1992 was valued at 250 billion rubles (for value of the ruble—see Glossary), while the cost of Kyrgyzstan's imports was put at 400 billion rubles. In 1992 Russia began discounting the

paper value of the Kyrgyzstan ruble, effectively devaluing the goods that Kyrgyzstan was supplying. Moscow then required that the country assume the imposed "difference" as a loan, which had the effect of increasing Kyrgyzstan's debt burden.

To escape the disparities inherent in dependence on the ruble, in May 1993 Kyrgyzstan was the first former Soviet republic to leave the ruble zone (see Glossary) and introduce its own currency, the som. This new policy earned Kyrgyzstan the hostility of neighboring Kazakstan and Uzbekistan, which had declared loyalty to the ruble and feared an avalanche of devalued Kyrgyzstani rubles entering their countries. The som, which is fully convertible to foreign currency and has a floating exchange rate, has been underwritten largely by the IMF, which has provided a large measure of stability. After introduction at a rate of two som to the United States dollar, the som traded at eleven to the dollar at the end of 1995. According to President Akayev, about half the som in circulation are backed by gold or by international loans. Although the som has received strong international backing, experts questioned the likelihood that such support would continue once other new national currencies emerged in former Soviet republics, eliminating the som's status as a unique experiment. Such doubt grew clear as Kyrgyzstan's first international loans came due in 1995, with scheduled payments of approximately US\$58 million that year, rising to nearly US\$100 million the next year. The republic's collapsed economy made it possible that Kyrgyzstan would become a permanent international client state.

Especially in the first year of independence, hyperinflation seriously eroded buying power (see table 10, Appendix). At the end of 1992, wholesale prices were more than eighteen times higher than in 1991. Retail prices rose 40 percent in December 1992 alone, explaining in part why retail sales declined by 64 percent from 1991, the greatest decline in all of Central Asia. Between 1990 and 1992, meat consumption dropped 20 percent, milk product consumption by 30 percent, and fats consumption by 40 percent. Beginning in 1993, however, international support for the som and for Kyrgyzstan's economy in general has kept inflation much lower than it is elsewhere in the CIS. From a high of about 1,400 percent annually in 1992 and 1993 (caused mainly by large increases in fuel costs), inflation dropped to about 180 percent for 1994 (mainly because of tighter credit and the government's reduced expenditures); the government's inflation target for

1995, set in cooperation with the IMF, was 55 percent, with monthly declines throughout the year. Prices rose by 16 percent in the first quarter of 1995, slightly above target, but budgetary expenditures for the first half of the year were far above the IMF target of 5 percent of GDP.

In the spring of 1995, average monthly pay in Kyrgyzstan was 508 som, compared with a government-estimated minimum family budget of 487 som. Earning statistics are not considered totally reliable, however. In 1995 food required an average of 61 percent of the family budget. To eliminate price distortions inherited from price support policies of the Soviet regime, the Akayev government decontrolled most prices in 1992, which had the immediate result of fueling inflation and reducing individual purchasing power. The economic decline of 1993 caused reintroduction of price controls, notably on agricultural products, and ceilings of 10 to 25 percent were placed on price increases for a wide range of retail commodities. The state Anti-Monopoly and Pricing Committee restricted pricing decisions in most of Kyrgyzstan's large enterprises. Although such institutional mechanisms did not work consistently, they encouraged development of unofficial economic arrangements and barter arrangements, which further undermined the national economy. In 1994 the government again reversed its policy, ending obligatory sale and price controls on agricultural goods that had depressed the agricultural market. The reform would nominally free farmers to negotiate commodity prices with government agencies and other buyers. However, because the government remained the only large-scale purchaser of many products, liberalizing the procurement process was not expected to have immediate effects.

### **Foreign Investment**

Domestic economic investment declined precipitously in the early 1990s, with government investment falling 55 percent in 1994 alone. In the first quarter of 1995, total public and private investment was reported to be 391 million som, of which about 75 percent went to the Kumtor joint-venture gold field. To stimulate foreign investment, the Kyrgyz government has adopted a series of measures to improve the republic's deteriorating economic environment. In the late 1980s, the republic already had begun creating a legal infrastructure to support private investment. The Basic Foreign Investment Law, adopted in June 1991, has been amended several times since

that time. In general, this law allows foreign investors full use of their profits, including unlimited export of profits in the form of foreign currency or merchandise.

Foreign firms also enjoy considerable tax advantages, which extend to Kyrgyzstani partners in joint ventures. Investors are granted relief from import duties on materials needed to establish a business, and they continue receiving tax relief for up to five years, depending on their type of business. After that time, several other types of tax relief are available, including various forms of reinvestment in Kyrgyzstan's economy.

As of April 1995, some 328 joint ventures were registered, but only 128 were actually in operation, the vast majority in trade. Only thirty-eight joint ventures were active in manufacturing or mining. At that time, sixty-eight foreign firms (outside the CIS) were registered, the majority of which were Chinese, Afghan, and Turkish. Some fifty-two Russian and thirty-six United States firms were present in some capacity. Kyrgyzstan was among the first of the former Soviet republics to create free economic zones, on the Chinese model, where taxes would be abated and duties waived. The government initially created two such zones, in Naryn and Osh, with another under consideration in Bishkek. The zones became the object of heated debate, however, and by 1995 only the Naryn zone had taken form as planned. The only large-scale foreign investment has been in the gold industry, where the Cameco and the United States Morrison-Knudson Corporation are participating in joint ventures.

## **Foreign Trade**

Kyrgyzstan's principal exports include wool, hides, and cotton (which combined to provide nearly 80 percent of total exports in 1994), together with electric power, electronic products, ferrous and nonferrous metals, food products, and shoes. Besides fuels, the largest volume of imports is in construction materials, ferrous metals, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and machinery. The largest CIS trading partners are Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, and the largest non-CIS partner is China (see table 15, Appendix). The predominance of barter agreements makes quantification of the latter relationship approximate, however. Of the estimated US\$44 million of trade with China in 1994, less than one-quarter was in cash. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan's economy was highly dependent on external trade. Total exports and imports in

1991 amounted to nearly 80 percent of the country's GDP, but by 1993 that total had shrunk to 52.5 percent. External trade, which in the early 1990s was conducted principally with the other republics of the former Soviet Union, resulted in a large trade deficit, mainly because of the need to obtain petroleum products and natural gas at the much higher prices of post-Soviet markets. During the first years of independence, the deficit from interrepublic and hard-currency (see Glossary) trade was about 20 percent of GDP.

In 1994 Kyrgyzstan substantially liberalized state regulation of trade. All export and import license requirements, the issuance of which was the center of recurring corruption rumors in the early 1990s, were eliminated excepting some hazardous materials. Export taxes, which had been levied mainly in retaliation for Russian export taxes, were reduced or eliminated, and plans called for their complete elimination by the end of 1995. Import duties on goods from non-CIS countries were fixed at 5 to 15 percent; there are no duties on goods from within the CIS.

The Ministry for Industry, Trade, and Material Resources is the chief agency for obtaining goods for export and distributing imports. Until the liberalization of 1994, a number of government-signed clearing agreements with former Soviet republics set terms for barter agreements that often avoided the problems caused by late payments. In 1993 such an agreement with Russia exchanged raw cotton, wool, and tobacco and scrap metal for petroleum products, wood, and metal products. Another agreement with Uzbekistan brought natural gas and fertilizers in exchange for nonferrous metals, electrical products, and butter. A third example is the coal-for-electricity arrangement with Kazakstan (see Energy, this ch.). Commodity values for such agreements usually were close to world levels, but the rigid procurement methods required for such bilateral trades have distorted the rest of the national economy.

In 1994 Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade decreased by 16.6 percent (to US\$93.4 million, after a drop of 65 percent in the 1992-93 period) for exports and by more than 50 percent (to US\$52.6 million) for imports. Trade with non-CIS partners showed a surplus, but more than 85 percent of trade still was transacted with CIS nations. Although the condition of the domestic economy did not seem to favor an upturn in foreign trade for 1995, Kyrgyz policy makers expected that increased foreign assistance would improve the trade situation somewhat.

In February 1994, Kyrgyzstan joined with Kazakstan and Uzbekistan in creating the Central Asian Free Trade Zone in reaction to the collapse of the new ruble zone proposed by Russia in late 1993. Although not the full organization of Central Asian nations that had been envisioned by intellectuals since before independence, this exclusively economic agreement was able to abolish trade barriers among the partners immediately, and trade between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan increased in 1994. But further conditions on credit, prices, taxes, customs, currency convertibility, and creation of a common economic zone in the Fergana Valley, the vital economic region shared by the three partners and Tajikistan, were delayed throughout 1994 and the first half of 1995. Kyrgyzstan has announced its intention to join the World Trade Organization (WTO—see Glossary), successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

## **Transportation and Telecommunications**

For reasons of commerce and national unity, Kyrgyzstan urgently needs improved systems of transportation and telecommunications, neither of which has received adequate attention since the 1980s. Some projects did, however, benefit from substantial foreign investment in the early and mid-1990s.

### **Transportation**

The failure to develop Kyrgyzstan's internal communications has exacerbated the republic's tendencies toward regional division between the north (dominated by the population center of Bishkek) and the south (dominated by the population center of Osh). The two regions are separated by sparsely populated, mountainous terrain (see fig. 2; Topography and Drainage, this ch.). Transportation problems have been exacerbated by the country's energy dependence, which includes the import of 100 percent of its gasoline supply. The republic's road and railroad systems are divided into two parts. The northern part is integrated with the transportation networks of Kazakstan, and the southern part is integrated with the networks of Uzbekistan. Three government agencies are responsible for transportation: the Ministry of Transportation, the State Civil Aviation Agency, and the Bishkek Railway Department. Kyrgyzstan is part of a large-scale project to coordinate development of the transportation infrastructure in the heartland of



Asia, sponsored by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The agency plans to spend as much as US\$1.5 trillion between 1993 and 2000 to facilitate trans-Asian railroad and highway connections.

In 1990 Kyrgyzstan had 28,400 kilometers of roads, of which 22,400 were hard-surfaced. Some 371 million passengers and 43.9 million tons of freight traveled by road in 1992, accounting for 95 percent and 72 percent of total passengers and freight, respectively. The Karakorum Highway, a Chinese-built road from Ürümqi, at the eastern end of the Tian Shan in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, to Islamabad in northern Pakistan, has a connector to Bishkek, which is 1,900 kilometers from Islamabad (and 3,500 kilometers from Karachi on the Arabian Sea) by that route. A planned connector from Osh via Sary-Tash would cut 200 kilometers from those distances. In 1994 the condition of the country's roads was made a state secret.

Although Kyrgyzstan imports 100 percent of the gasoline it uses, government subsidies have kept gasoline prices relatively low because of the economic role of the nation's roads; in early 1995, tariff increases pushed the average price to roughly US\$.30 per liter. The subsidy system has meant that supply is quite erratic and unpredictable; an acute shortage occurred in April 1995, raising the black-market gasoline price above US\$.50 per liter.

In a country where 95 percent of freight moves by truck, the gasoline shortage has largely isolated the more remote provinces, and it has made ambulance, fire, and police services difficult to maintain. In at least one town in Osh Province, officials responded to the fuel shortage simply by shutting off all services, leaving the people without light, heat, or power. Public transportation has been doubly burdened because the gasoline shortage has restricted use of private cars and crowded an increased number of riders onto a reduced number of buses. In some cities, such as Kant and Naryn, the city bus services simply stopped running, making it almost impossible for people to get to work. Naryn's solution was to replace the municipal buses with horse-drawn omnibuses.

Rail transport plays a minor role, with a total of 370 kilometers of track, mostly in the north, providing links to Russia via Kazakstan. In the Soviet system, all rail freight moved along this corridor. Short lines in the south connect towns with the Ursatvskaya-Andijon Line in Uzbekistan. In 1992 some 1.7 million

passengers and 5.5 million tons of freight were transported by rail. A rail link from Ürümqi to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, was opened in 1994, widening Kyrgyzstan's export possibilities. In 1995 a spur of that line opened from Ashgabat to Bandar-Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz in southern Iran. Although a proposal has been made to build a north-south rail link connecting Balychki with Kara-Keche, the money for such a project is not expected to be available in the foreseeable future.

In the early 1990s, available air transport facilities were inadequate. The national airline was formed from a share of the aircraft and personnel allocated from the Soviet airline Aeroflot. Manas, the international airport at Bishkek (named after the mythical national hero), was modernized in 1988 to make it the most modern commercial airport in Central Asia. A second international facility is located at Osh, and about twenty-five usable local fields supplement air service. Manas Airport originally offered flights to fifty cities in the CIS, including regular service to Moscow and Tashkent, and charter flights to China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. However, that facility has been almost unused since 1991. The shortage of jet fuel has forced Kyrgyzstan to rely almost completely on the Almaty international airport, four hours by road from Bishkek, for international connections, and the availability of air transport greatly decreased in the early 1990s. The loss of air services has exacerbated the country's tendency toward a north-south split.

### **Telecommunications**

Telecommunications in Kyrgyzstan, generally inadequate, suffer from the historically low priority accorded by Soviet authorities to development of that type of infrastructure. In 1994 only 364,000 main telephone lines, or one per twelve Kyrgyzstanis, were in service. Since independence a thriving black market has developed in cable stolen from existing telephone installations, removing many portions of the telephone system from operation. The average age of system components is about fifteen years. Because much existing equipment is operating at capacity, heavier service loads (which experts judge an absolutely necessary element of economic expansion) require large-scale equipment replacement. In 1991 about 600 lines connected Kyrgyzstan to the rest of the Soviet Union; sixty channels connected the republic to international lines via Moscow. In 1995 international calls still were connected through Moscow, allowing Kyrgyzstan to benefit indirectly from the gen-

eral upgrading of services that has occurred in Russia in the early 1990s. In 1994 Kyrgyzstan received a loan of US\$8 million and US\$1.5 million in technical assistance from the European Bank for Recovery and Development (EBRD) to upgrade its telecommunications services, especially in the mountainous regions. The Ministry of Communications is responsible for local, national, and international telephone, telex, telegraph, and data communications. The ministry also is charged with postal services, radio and television broadcasting, and management of subscriptions and deliveries of news publications. Telecommunications, despite low tariffs, have been profitable enough to operate independently of the state budget since 1986. But without a revision of the tariff structure and institutional and regulatory restructuring, the state of telecommunications places a major constraint on the development of a market-oriented economy.

Kyrgyzstan Radio and Kyrgyzstan Television are state broadcasting companies. The two state-run national radio stations broadcast some English and German programming. One commercial radio station is in operation. In 1993 three hours of television programming were available per day; Kyrgyzstan Television receives its color broadcasts from the Secam network.

## **Government and Politics**

As independence has progressed, politics have grown increasingly tangled in Kyrgyzstan. President Akayev, who took office amid a chain of events that lent credence to an idealistic promise of democratic reform and stability, has proven more able to formulate goals than to carry them out. Although a constitution was ratified in 1993, many terms of that document have not yet gone into force.

## **Background**

In March 1990, while still part of the Soviet Union, the republic elected a 350-member Jogorku Kenesh (parliament), which remained in power until it dissolved itself in September 1994. This body was elected under the rules prescribed by the *perestroika* (see Glossary) policy of Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, which mandated that at least 80 percent of legislative seats be contested even though communists likely would win most seats. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, five seats went to the

initial opposition movement, the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK).

Over time it has become apparent that President Akayev prefers dealing with administrators subordinate to him rather than with legislators. The initial harmony between Akayev and the parliament began to sour in 1993. A number of specific points of contention arose, most of them related to growing legislative resistance to what was widely viewed to be government corruption and mismanagement. Throughout 1993 the parliament sought aggressively to extend control over the executive branch. The allotment of development concessions for two of the republic's largest gold deposits was a particular rallying point (see Natural Resources, this ch.). The chief representative of Cameco, Boris Birshtein, was a Swiss citizen who had been named in a number of financial scandals in Russia and elsewhere in the CIS. When it was discovered that the Kyrgyzstani negotiating team that had sealed the Cameco transaction had financial interests in the deal, the agreement nearly was cancelled entirely. In December 1993, public protest about this gold concession brought down the government of Prime Minister Tursunbek Chyngyshev and badly damaged Akayev's popularity and credibility.

Chyngyshev was replaced by Apas Jumagulov, who had been prime minister during the late Soviet period. Jumagulov was reappointed in March 1995 and again in March 1996. Akayev was not publicly accused of being involved in the gold scandals, but numerous rumors have mentioned corruption and influence-peddling in the Akayev family, especially in the entourage of his wife. As these rumors circulated more widely, President Akayev held a public referendum of approval for his presidency in January 1994. Most impartial observers regarded the 96 percent approval that Akayev claimed after the referendum as a political fiction.

## **Constitution**

Besides electing Akayev, the 1990 parliament fashioned the legislative foundation for the political transformation of the republic, in concert with the president. Perhaps the biggest accomplishment in this phase was the drafting and passage, in May 1993, of the country's constitution. The constitution mandates three branches of government: a unicameral parliament; an executive branch, consisting of government and local offi-

cially appointed by the president; and a judiciary, with a presidentially appointed Supreme Court and lower courts.

In many ways, however, the constitution has not been put into force. Akayev is still president under a popular mandate gained in an uncontested election in 1991, and most of the judicial system has not been appointed. The existing bicameral parliament, which was elected early in 1995, does not match the unicameral body prescribed by the constitution. This structural change was attained through popular referendum, for which the constitution does not provide, although the same referendum simultaneously gave popular (and retroactive) permission for this abrogation of the constitution. In February 1996, Akayev's proposed constitutional amendments strengthening the office of president were approved by 94 percent of voters in a national referendum.

### **Structure of Government**

Although the constitution calls for a government of three branches, in practice the presidency has been the strongest government office. As economic and social conditions deteriorated in the early 1990s, President Akayev sought extraconstitutional authority in dealing with a series of crises. Under these conditions, Akayev faced occasional opposition from parliament, and pockets of local resistance grew stronger in the southern provinces.

#### ***President and Council of Ministers***

Akayev is able to act as he does because under the constitution the president stands outside the three-branch system in the capacity of guarantor of the constitutional functioning of all three branches. The president names the prime minister and the Council of Ministers, subject to legislative confirmation.

According to the constitution, the president is to be elected once every five years, for no more than two terms, from among citizens who are between thirty-five and sixty-five years of age, who have lived at least fifteen years in the republic, and who are fluent in the state language, which is Kyrgyz. There is no vice president. Akayev defied predictions that he would seek referendum approval of an extension of his term rather than stand for reelection in 1996 as mandated in the constitution. (The presidents of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan had followed the former course in 1994 and 1995.) In the pres-

idential election of December 1995, Akayev gained 71.6 percent of the vote against two communist challengers. Several other political figures protested that they had been prevented illegally from participating. International observers found the election free and fair. Earlier, newly elected deputies of the 1995 parliament had proposed that presidential elections be postponed until at least the year 2000, with Akayev to remain president in the interim. According to rumors, Akayev favored using a referendum to extend his own term of office, but he found acceptance of parliament's proposal unwise. Kyrgyzstan depends heavily on the loans of Western banks and governments, who objected strenuously to the cancellation of elections as a "step back from democracy."

The Council of Ministers nominally is entrusted with day-to-day administration of the government. In general, however, the office of the presidency has dominated policy making; in most cases, Akayev's prerogative of appointing the prime minister and all cabinet positions has not been effectively balanced by the nominal veto power of parliament over such appointments. The new parliament of 1995 showed considerably more independence by vetoing several key Akayev administrative appointments. In February 1996, the government resigned following the approval of Akayev's constitutional amendments. The new government that Akayev appointed in March 1996 included fifteen ministries: agriculture, communications, culture, defense, economy, education and science, finance, foreign affairs, health, industry and trade, internal affairs, justice, labor and social welfare, transportation, and water resources, plus deputy prime ministers for agrarian policy, sociocultural policy, and industrial policy and the chairmen of nine committees and agencies. Many individuals retained their positions from the preceding government; changes occurred mainly in agencies dealing with social affairs and the economy.

### *Legislature*

In October 1994, Akayev took the legally questionable step of holding a referendum to ask public approval for bypassing legal requirements to amend the constitution. The referendum asked permission to amend the constitution to establish a bicameral legislature that would include an upper chamber, called the Legislative House, which would have only thirty-five members. Those deputies would receive government salaries and would sit in permanent session. A lower chamber, the

House of National Representatives, would have seventy members and would convene more irregularly. Akayev's plan also provided that deputies in this new parliament would not be able to hold other government positions, a clause that caused most of the republic's prominent politicians to drop out of consideration for election to parliament.

In the elections to the new parliament that began in February 1995, only sixteen deputies managed to get clear mandates on the first round of balloting. Second-round voting also proved indecisive. When the parliament was convened for the first time, in March 1995, fifteen seats remained unfilled; two important provinces (Naryn and Talas) had no deputies in the upper house at all, prompting angry cries that regional interests were not being properly represented when the two houses elected their respective speakers. A later round of elections, which extended into May, was marked by widespread accusations of fraud, ballot-stuffing, and government manipulation.

Such circumstances aroused strong doubts about the legislative competency of the parliament. Only six of the deputies have previous parliamentary experience, and a number of prominent political figures, including Medetkan Sherymkulov, speaker of the 1990-94 parliament, failed to win what had been assumed were "safe" seats. Even more serious were concerns about the incomplete mandate of the new legislative system. The constitutional modifications voted on by referendum did not specify what the duties and limitations of the two houses would be. Thus, the early sessions of 1995 were preoccupied by procedural wranglings over the respective rights and responsibilities of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Because little business of substance was conducted in that session, several deputies threatened that this parliament, like the previous one, might "self-dissolve." However, the body remained intact as of mid-1996.

### *Judiciary*

According to the constitution, judges are to be chosen by the president, subject to parliamentary confirmation. Potential judges must be Kyrgyzstani citizens between thirty-five and sixty-five years of age who have legal training and at least ten years of legal experience. The length of judges' tenure is unlimited, but judges are subject to dismissal for cause by parliament. In the mid-1990s, the judicial system remained incomplete both in the filling of prescribed positions and in the

establishment of judicial procedures and precedents. A Supreme Court was appointed, but its functioning was delayed in 1995 by parliament's refusal to approve Akayev's nominee as chief justice. Although the parliament of 1991–94 also mandated a national constitutional court (over the objections of Akayev), that body never has been established.

In general, the rule of law is not well established in the republic. The one area of the law that has flourished in Kyrgyzstan is libel law, which public figures have used widely to control the republic's press. By contrast, the observance of laws designed for the regulation of the economy is not uniform or consistent, even by government officials. The functioning of the State Arbitration Court, which has responsibility for financial and jurisdictional disputes within government agencies and between government agencies and private enterprises, has been extremely irregular and lacking in oversight by any other government institution.

### *Local Government*

The republic is divided into seven administrative regions: six provinces and the capital city of Bishkek. The so-called northern provinces are Naryn, Ysyk-Köl, Chu, and Talas, and the southern provinces are Osh and Jalal-Abad. Jalal-Abad was formed out of Osh Province in 1991, largely to disperse the political strength of the south that had become centered in Osh. Each province has a local legislature, but real power is wielded by the province governor (until 1996 called the *akim*), who is a presidential appointee. In some cases, the *akim* became a powerful spokesman for regional interests, running the district with considerable autonomy. Particularly notable in this regard was Jumagul Saadanbekov, the *akim* of Ysyk-Köl Province. The government reorganization of early 1996 widened the governors' responsibilities for tax collection, pensions, and a variety of other economic and social functions.

Akayev has had difficulty establishing control over the two southern provinces. Several southern politicians (the most important of whom was Sheraly Sydykov, scion of an old Osh family that enjoyed great prominence in the Soviet era) have taken the lead in national opposition against Akayev. Sydykov headed the parliamentary corruption commission in 1994, and he headed the influential banking and ethics committees of the parliament elected in 1995.



When the *akim* of Osh resigned to run for the new parliament, Akayev appointed as his replacement Janysh Rustambekov, an Akayev protégé who had been state secretary. Rustambekov, the first northerner to head this southern province and a highly controversial appointment, was considered to be a direct surrogate of Akayev in improving control over the south. Rustambekov, who has fired large numbers of local administrators, is opposed chiefly by Osh Province Council head Bekamat Osmonov, who is one of the most skilled and influential politicians in the south. Osmonov, who also was a deputy in the lower house of the new legislature, emerged as a powerful critic of Akayev and a possible presidential rival if Akayev could not prevent the next election.

### **Political Parties**

The period immediately preceding and following independence saw a proliferation of political groups of various sizes and platforms. Although President Akayev emerged from the strongest of those groups, in the early 1990s no organized party system developed either around Akayev or in opposition to him.

#### ***Communist Parties***

The Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (CPK), which was the only legal political party during the Soviet years, was abolished in 1991 in the aftermath of the failed coup against the Gorbachev government of the Soviet Union. A successor, the Kyrgyzstan Communist Party, was allowed to register in September 1992. It elected two deputies to the lower house of parliament in 1995. In that party, significant oppositionists include past republic leader Absamat Masaliyev, a former first secretary of the CPK. The 1995 election also gave a deputy's mandate to T. Usubaliyev, who had been head of the CPK and leader of the republic between 1964 and 1982. Another party with many former communist officials is the Republican People's Party. Two other, smaller neocommunist parties are the Social Democrats of Kyrgyzstan, which gained three seats in the upper house and eight seats in the lower house of the 1995 parliament, and the People's Party of Kyrgyzstan, which holds three seats in the lower house.

#### ***Other Parties***

All of the other parties in existence in 1995 began as unsanc-

tioned civic movements. The first is Ashar (Help), which was founded in 1989 as a movement to take over unused land for housing; Ashar took one seat in the upper house in the 1995 elections. A fluctuating number of parties and groups are joined under the umbrella of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK); the most influential is Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Freedom for Kyrgyzstan), which in late 1992 split into two parties, one retaining the name Erkin Kyrgyzstan, and the other called Ata-meken (Fatherland). In the 1995 elections, Erkin Kyrgyzstan took one seat and Ata-meken two seats in the upper house. In the spring of 1995, the head of Erkin Kyrgyzstan was indicted for embezzling funds from the university of which he is a rector; it is unclear whether or not this accusation was politically motivated.

Another democratically inclined party, Asaba (Banner) also took one seat in the upper house. Registration was denied to another group, the Freedom Party, because its platform includes the creation of an Uygur autonomous district extending into the Chinese Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which the Chinese government opposes. The Union of Germans took one seat in the lower house, and a Russian nationalist group, Concord, also took one seat.

For all their proliferation, parties have not yet played a large part in independent Kyrgyzstan. In the mid-1990s, early enthusiasm for the democratic parties faded as the republic's economy grew worse and party officials were implicated in the republic's proliferating political corruption. The communist successor parties, on the other hand, appeared to gain influence in this period. In the absence of elections, and with President Akayev belonging to no party, it is difficult to predict the future significance of any of these parties.

## **The Media**

For the first two years of independence, Kyrgyzstan's newspapers were a remarkable phenomenon, with real political significance and power. Save that Kyrgyzstan's newspapers had not yet developed a Western-style code of journalistic scrupulousness and restraint, it would have been possible to say that the press was beginning to become the fourth estate that the media represent in developed democracies. Through late 1993, Kyrgyzstan's newspapers enjoyed the greatest freedom of publication in any of the Central Asian nations, rivaling the freedom of the post-1991 Moscow press. Although a state secrecy com-

mittee had the power to require submission of materials in advance of publication, in fact the newspapers were able to discuss issues of public interest closely and dispassionately. During the gold scandals, for example, the newspapers played a crucial role in airing both opposition attacks on Akayev and his government, and the government's defense against those attacks.

Since 1993, however, the government has moved increasingly to impose control. In August 1993, formal censorship was briefly reimposed, but then a spirited outcry from the press brought a reversal of that move. More subtle methods of censorship were applied in January 1994, during the run-up to the public referendum on Akayev's performance. Although there are several independent or quasi-independent newspapers in the republic, all printing presses remain in government hands, which gives the state the option of simply refusing to print opposition newspapers.

In 1994 the Akayev government stepped up pressure on the local press, closing three newspapers entirely, including the popular Russian-language *Svobodnye gory*, the official organ of the parliament. Government officials also began to bring suits against newspapers as private individuals, claiming defamation and slander. One such case resulted in a costly judgement against the editor of *Delo No*, a tabloid-style scandal sheet that is perhaps the most widely read newspaper in the country. In the spring of 1995, Akayev used the same tactic against the editor of *Respublika*, long one of the most persistent and successful critics of the regime; the president succeeded in getting a judgement that forbids the editor from working for eighteen months.

Beginning in 1994, the Kyrgyz populace began to feel threatened by the government and other forces in the republic. The atmosphere has not been helped by a series of unexplained attacks on journalists, including one popular commentator, a persistent investigator of the gold scandals, who died after being struck on the head. Although the newsman's grave also was desecrated shortly after his burial, no government investigation was conducted. The government has shown reluctance to impose direct Soviet-style censorship, but Akayev warned in January 1995 that the press would be wise to begin practicing self-censorship and to print more positive news.

The economic conditions of journalism prevent any Kyrgyzstani newspaper from being totally free. None of the republic's papers has yet developed a sustaining readership, and

because the economy is insufficiently developed to provide advertising revenue, all newspapers must depend on sponsors. For many papers, including *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, which has the largest circulation, the sponsor is the government. Others such as *Asaba* have political sponsors, and at least one is sponsored by Turkish investors. Even the most independent of the papers, *Respublika*, has been forced to turn to commercial sponsors, which, according to rumor, include Seabeco-Kyrgyzstan, the scandal-tainted intermediary in the Kumtor gold deal.

The most important Russian-language newspapers are *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, the official government paper (circulation about 15,000 in 1994); *Vechernii Bishkek*, a more domestic city paper (reaching 75,000 readers on Fridays); the tabloid scandal sheet *Delo No* (30,000 copies); *Asaba*, the organ of the party of the same name (20,000 copies); and *Respublika*, the most prominent surviving opposition paper (7,000 copies). The major Kyrgyz language newspapers are *Kyrgyz guusu* and *Kut Bilim*. A bilingual newspaper, *Erkin Too/Svobodnye gory*, has appeared, but, unlike its earlier namesake, it is not an opposition paper. One English-language paper, *Kyrgyzstan Chronicle*, mostly reproduces articles from foreign English-language sources.

The electronic media are unevenly developed in the republic, both because of the physical constraints imposed by the country's mountainous terrain and because of financial difficulties. Resources are concentrated in Bishkek, which is well supplied with television and with radio. Penetration of more remote areas, however, is incomplete.

The government retains ownership of all but one broadcast facility, giving it a strong voice in the development of independent programming. There is at least one independent radio company, called *Piramida*, and several independent television production companies. In June 1995, the government proposed reinstatement of formal state control over all broadcasting in the republic.

Financial problems have caused Kyrgyzstan to cut back on the number of hours of Russian television that it relays from Moscow, although the Russian government has shown an inclination to work with Kyrgyzstan to keep Russian-language programming on the air in the republic. In the south, most programming originates in Uzbekistan, a situation that tends to exacerbate the north-south split within Kyrgyzstan.

## **Human Rights**

In its early days, Kyrgyzstan demonstrated a strong commitment to observation of human rights, from which it has subsequently stepped back. Nevertheless, the republic remains generally more sensitive to human rights than are the states in its immediate environment.

The republic's constitution provides very strong guarantees of personal liberty, protection of privacy, freedom of assembly and expression, and other hallmarks of democratic societies. On several occasions, the government has violated or abrogated the constitution, raising the possibility of abuse of human rights.

In practice, however, the Akayev government has proven itself generally responsive on issues of human rights, at least in part because of the republic's dependence upon the approval of Western financial supporters. The present legal system, which remains based almost entirely upon Soviet-era practices, does permit pre-trial detention of up to one year (there is no bail), which in one or two celebrated cases has appeared abusive. However, international monitoring organizations have found no evidence of political arrests, detentions, disappearances, or extrajudicial punishments. There have been some unsubstantiated complaints by political activists of wiretapping and other illegal surveillance.

In a celebrated case in 1992, Uzbekistani security forces arrested two Uzbek delegates to a human rights conference held in Bishkek. Although this arrest was subsequently found to be in technical agreement with Kyrgyzstani law, the public manner in which the arrest was conducted demonstrated Kyrgyzstan's lack of resources to defend human rights activists.

## **Foreign Relations**

Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy has been controlled by two considerations—first, that the country is too small and too poor to be economically viable without considerable outside assistance, and second, that it lies in a volatile corner of the globe, vulnerable to a number of unpleasant possibilities. These two considerations have influenced substantially the international position taken by Kyrgyzstan, especially toward the developed nations and its immediate neighbors.

Akayev and his ministers have traveled the globe tirelessly since independence, seeking relations and partners. In the first

four years of independence, Akayev visited the United States, Turkey, Switzerland, Japan, Singapore, and Israel. His emissaries have also been to Iran, Lebanon, and South Africa, and his prime minister made a trip through most of Europe. One consequence of these travels is that Kyrgyzstan is recognized by 120 nations and has diplomatic relations with sixty-one of them. The United States embassy opened in Bishkek in February 1992, and a Kyrgyzstani embassy was established in Washington later that year. Kyrgyzstan is a member of most major international bodies, including the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE—see Glossary), the World Bank, the IMF, and the EBRD. It has also joined the Asian Development Bank, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO—see Glossary), and the Islamic Bank.

Akayev has stressed repeatedly that the principle behind his search for contacts is strict neutrality; Kyrgyzstan is a small, relatively resource-poor, remote nation more likely to seek help from the world community than to contribute to it. Especially in the first months of independence, Akayev stressed Kyrgyzstan's intellectual and political potential, hoping to attract the world community to take risks in an isolated experiment in democracy. Akayev referred to making his nation an Asian Switzerland, transformed by a combination of international finance and the light, clean industry, mostly electronic, that he expected to spring up from conversion of the Soviet-era defense industries. Largely because of Akayev's reputation and personality, Kyrgyzstan has become the largest per capita recipient of foreign aid in the CIS (see Foreign Investment, this ch.).

However, the decay of the domestic economy and increasing dissatisfaction among constituents have made the Akayev government distinctly less optimistic about the degree to which it can rely upon the distant world community. At the same time, political and social developments in the republic's immediate area have directed the republic's attention increasingly to foreign policy concerns much closer to home.

### **Central Asian Neighbors**

Kyrgyzstan is bordered by four nations, three of which—Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—are former Soviet republics. China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, where a substantial separatist movement has been active, also adjoins the republic. Although Kazakstan and Uzbekistan have recog-

nized their existing borders with Kyrgyzstan, as of 1996 Tajikistan had not done so. China recognizes the old Soviet Union border but is said to have objections to twelve specific points of its common border with Kyrgyzstan. The objections have been referred to a Chinese-CIS border committee for resolution.

Undoubtedly the most immediate concern is neighboring Uzbekistan, which, under the leadership of President Islam Karimov, is emerging as the strongest state in post-Soviet Central Asia. Although Uzbekistan faces serious economic problems of its own, it has a homogeneous and well-educated population of more than 20 million, a diversified and developed economy, and sufficient natural resources to allow the country to become self-sufficient in energy and a major exporter of gold, cotton, and natural gas (see *The Economy*, ch. 5).

Uzbekistan has the best organized and best disciplined security forces in all of Central Asia, as well as a relatively large and experienced army and air force. Uzbekistan dominates southern Kyrgyzstan both economically and politically, based on the large Uzbek population in that region of Kyrgyzstan and on economic and geographic conditions (see *Ethnic Groups*, this ch.). Much of Kyrgyzstan depends entirely on Uzbekistan for natural gas; on several occasions, Karimov has achieved political ends by shutting pipelines or by adjusting terms of delivery. In a number of television appearances broadcast in the Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces of Kyrgyzstan, Karimov has addressed Akayev with considerable condescension; Akayev, in turn, has been highly deferential to his much stronger neighbor. Although Uzbekistan has not shown overt expansionist tendencies, the Kyrgyz government is acutely aware of the implications of Karimov's assertions that he is responsible for the well-being of all Uzbeks, regardless of their nation of residence.

Although it presents no such expansionist threat, Kazakhstan is as important to northern Kyrgyzstan as Uzbekistan is to the south. The virtual closure of Manas Airport at Bishkek makes Kazakhstan's capital, Almaty, the principal point of entry to Kyrgyzstan. The northwestern city of Talas receives nearly all of its services through the city of Dzhambyl, across the border in Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev has cooperated in economic agreements, in May 1993 Kyrgyzstan's introduction of the som caused Nazarbayev to close his country's border with Kyrgyzstan to avoid a flood of worthless Kyrgyzstani rubles.

Kyrgyzstan's relations with Tajikistan have been tense. Refugees and antigovernment fighters in Tajikistan have crossed into Kyrgyzstan several times, even taking hostages. Kyrgyzstan attempted to assist in brokering an agreement between contesting Tajikistani forces in October 1992 but without success. Akayev later joined presidents Karimov and Nazarbayev in sending a joint intervention force to support Tajikistan's president Imomali Rahmonov against insurgents, but the Kyrgyzstani parliament delayed the mission of its small contingent for several months until late spring 1993. In mid-1995 Kyrgyzstani forces had the responsibility of sealing a small portion of the Tajikistan border near Panj from Tajikistani rebel forces.

The greater risk to Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan is the general destabilization that the protracted civil war has brought to the region. In particular, the Khorugh-Osh road, the so-called "highway above the clouds," has become a major conduit of contraband of all sorts, including weapons and drugs (see Internal Security, this ch.). A meeting of the heads of the state security agencies of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, and Uzbekistan, held in Osh in the spring of 1995, also drew the conclusion that ethnic, social, and economic conditions in Osh were increasingly similar to those in Tajikistan in the late 1980s, thus recognizing the contagion of Tajikistan's instability.

Chinese-Kyrgyzstani relations are an area of substantial uncertainty for the government in Bishkek. China has become Kyrgyzstan's largest non-CIS trade partner, but China's influence is stronger in the north of Kyrgyzstan than in the south. This limitation could change if efforts to join the Karakorum Highway to Osh through Sary-Tash are successful. The free-trade zone in Naryn has attracted large numbers of Chinese businesspeople, who have come to dominate most of the republic's import and export of small goods. Most of this trade is in barter conducted by ethnic Kyrgyz or Kazaks who are Chinese citizens. The Kyrgyzstani government has expressed alarm over the numbers of Chinese who are moving into Naryn and other parts of Kyrgyzstan, but no preventive measures have been taken.

The Akayev government also must be solicitous of Chinese sensibilities on questions of nationalism because the Chinese do not want the independence of the Central Asian states to stimulate dreams of statehood among their own Turkic Muslim peoples. Although the Kyrgyz in China have been historically quiescent, China's Uyghurs (of whom there is a small exile com-



munity in Kyrgyzstan) have been militant in their desire to attain independence. This is the major reason that Kyrgyzstan has refused to permit the formation of an Uygur party (see *Political Parties*, this ch.).

In the 1990s, trade with China has grown to such a volume that some officials in Kyrgyzstan fear that by the late 1990s Kyrgyzstan's economy will be entirely dominated by China. In some political quarters, the prospect of Chinese domination has stimulated nostalgia for the days of Moscow's control.

## **Russia**

In fact, whereas the other Central Asian republics have sometimes complained of Russian interference, Kyrgyzstan has more often wished for more attention and support from Moscow than it has been able to obtain. For all the financial support that the world community has offered, Kyrgyzstan remains economically dependent on Russia, both directly and through Kazakstan. In early 1995, Akayev attempted to sell Russian companies controlling shares in the republic's twenty-nine largest industrial plants, an offer that Russia refused.

Akayev has been equally enthusiastic about more direct forms of reintegration, such as the Euro-Asian Union that Nazarbayev proposed in June 1994. Because Kyrgyzstan presumably would receive much more from such a union than it would contribute, Akayev's enthusiasm has met with little response from Russia and the other, larger states that would be involved in such an arrangement. Akayev's invitation for Russian border guards to take charge of Kyrgyzstan's Chinese border, a major revision of his policy of neutrality, was another move toward reintegration (see *Armed Forces*, this ch.).

The Kyrgyzstani government also has felt compelled to request Russia's economic protection. The harsh reality of Kyrgyzstan's economic situation means that the nation is an inevitable international client state, at least for the foreseeable future. Despite concerted efforts to seek international "sponsors," Akayev has not received much more than a great deal of international good will. Even if the president had not lived seventeen years in Russia himself and even if his advisers, family, and friends were not all Soviet-era intellectuals with a high degree of familiarity with Russia, economic necessity probably would push Kyrgyzstan further toward Russia.

On his February 1994 visit to Moscow, Akayev signed several economic agreements. Having promised the republic a 75-bil-

lion-ruble line of credit (presumably for use in 1994) and some US\$65 million in trade agreements, Russia also promised to extend to Kyrgyzstan most-favored-nation status for the purchase of oil and other fuels. For its part, Kyrgyzstan agreed to the creation of a Kyrgyzstani-Russian investment company, which would purchase idle defense-related factories in the republic to provide employment for the increasingly dissatisfied Russian population of Kyrgyzstan. In early 1995, prime ministers Jumagulov of Kyrgyzstan and Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia signed a series of agreements establishing bilateral coordination of economic reform in the two states, further binding Kyrgyzstan to Russia. After lobbying hard for inclusion, Kyrgyzstan became a member of the customs union that Russia, Belarus, and Kazakstan established in February 1996.

For its part, Russia sees aid to Kyrgyzstan as a successful precedent in its new policy of gaining influence in its "near abroad," the states that once were Soviet republics. Russia does not want a massive in-migration of Russians from the new republics; some 2 million ethnic Russians moved back to Russia between 1992 and 1995, with at least that many again expected by the end of the century. Akayev, on the other hand, must find a way to stem the loss of his Russian population, which already has caused an enormous deficit of doctors, teachers, and engineers.

For these reasons, despite opposition from Kyrgyz nationalists and other independence-minded politicians, in 1995 Akayev granted the request of Russian president Boris N. Yeltsin to review the constitutional provision making Kyrgyz the sole official language. Early in 1996, Kyrgyzstan took legal steps toward making Russian the republic's second official language, subject to amendment of the constitution. That initiative coincided with the customs union signed with Russia, Kazakstan, and Belarus in February 1996. The long-term success of Akayev's search for reintegration is questionable because of Kyrgyzstan's minimal strategic importance and the potential cost to an outside country supporting the republic's shaky economy.

## **National Security**

Located in a region of low strategic importance and surrounded by nations with major concerns in other directions, Kyrgyzstan did not make developing its own armed forces a high priority after separation from the Soviet Union. The long-

standing civil war in nearby Tajikistan, however, has forced reevaluation of that conservative position. Internal security has been a major concern because of rampant crime and a well-developed narcotics industry.

## **Armed Forces**

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan began to build a small armed force based on the military doctrine that Russia will remain chief guarantor of Kyrgyzstan's national security interests. The only operational branch of the armed forces is the ground forces.

### *Development of Military Policy*

Kyrgyzstan made its first moves toward a national military force in September 1991, immediately after declaring independence, by drawing up plans to create a national guard. However, events overtook that plan, which was never realized. In the early months of independence, President Akayev was an avid supporter of a proposed "unified army" of the CIS, which would replace the former Soviet army. Those plans collapsed when Russia announced that it would not finance CIS troops. In April 1992, Kyrgyzstan formed a State Committee for Defense Affairs, and in June the republic took control of all troops on its soil (meaning remaining units of the former Soviet army). At that time, about 15,000 former Soviet soldiers of unknown ethnic identity remained in Kyrgyzstan.

Although the Kyrgyzstani government did not demand a new oath of service until after adoption of the Law on Military Service (the first draft of which in 1992 was copied so hastily from Soviet law that it included provisions for a navy), the majority of the officer corps (mostly Russian) refused to serve in a Kyrgyzstani army, and since that time many Russian officers have sought repatriation to Russia. A more informal outflow of draftees already had been underway before Kyrgyzstan's independence. According to one estimate, as many as 6,000 Russians deserted from duty in Kyrgyzstan, although that loss was partially offset by the return of almost 2,000 Kyrgyz who had been serving in the Soviet army outside their republic. According to reports, in 1993 between 3,000 and 4,000 non-Kyrgyz soldiers, mostly Russians, remained in the republic.

In the early days of independence, Kyrgyzstani authorities spoke of doing without an army entirely. That idea since has been replaced by plans to create a standing conscripted army



*Soldiers giving demonstration at Independence Day celebration,  
August 31, Bishkek  
Courtesy Hermine Dreyfuss*

of about 5,000 troops, with reserves of two to three times that number. The question of who would command these troops has been very troublesome. Russian officers continued leaving Kyrgyzstan through 1993 because of low pay and poor living conditions, and in 1994 Moscow was officially encouraging this exodus. To stem the out-migration, agreements signed in 1994 by Bishkek and Moscow obligate Kyrgyzstan to pay housing and relocation costs for Russian officers who agree to serve in the Kyrgyzstani army until 1999.

In 1994 Kyrgyzstan agreed to permit border troops of the Russian Army to assume the task of guarding Kyrgyzstan's border with China. This agreement followed Russia's complaints that continuing desertions by Kyrgyzstani border troops were leaving the former Soviet border—which Russia continues to argue is its proper border—essentially unguarded. Akayev has

periodically pushed for even more Russian military presence in the republic, hinting broadly that if Russia is not interested in resuming control of the Soviet airbases in the republic, perhaps other powers, such as the United States or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO—see Glossary), might be; however, the fact that Kyrgyzstan in early 1995 gave the last remnants of its Soviet-era air fleet to Uzbekistan in a debt swap suggests that neither Moscow nor Tashkent has taken such offers seriously.

It is not entirely clear what weapons Kyrgyzstan's army will possess. The republic lost twelve IL-39 jets in March 1992, when they were "repatriated" to Russia from a training field near the capital, and the 1995 swap with Uzbekistan lost an unknown number of MiG-21 fighters and L-39C close-support aircraft. Available information suggests strongly that Kyrgyzstan, as the least militarized of the Central Asian republics, is incapable of defending itself against a military threat from any quarter.

### ***Command Structure***

Formally, the army is under the command of the president, in his role as commander in chief; the National Security Council is the chief agency of defense policy. Established in 1994, the National Security Council has seven members, not including the president, who is the chairman: the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the state secretary, the minister of internal affairs, the minister of defense, the chairman of the State Committee for National Security (successor to the Kyrgyzstan branch of the Committee for State Security—KGB), and the commander of the National Guard. The president appoints and dismisses senior military officers. President Akayev also has followed the formulation of defense policy quite closely. The Ministry of Defense has operational command of military units; General Myrzakan Subanov has been minister of defense since the agency was founded in 1992. The Ministry of Defense and the National Security Council are advised by the Center for Analysis, a research institution established in 1992.

The chief of the General Staff, the second-ranking officer in the armed forces, is responsible for coordinating the National Security Council, the State Committee for National Security, the border troops, and civil defense. Since 1993 that position has been occupied by General Feliks Kulov, a Kyrgyz. The General Staff, modeled after the Russian structure, includes the

commanders of the National Guard, the ground forces, the air and air defense forces, and the internal forces.

### ***Ground Forces***

In 1996 the Kyrgyzstani ground forces included 7,000 troops, which comprise one motorized rifle division with armor and artillery capability. Sapper and signals regiments are attached, as is a mountain infantry brigade. Headquarters is at Bishkek. Plans called for the ground forces to be restructured in 1995 into a corps of two motorized rifle brigades and for an airborne battalion to be added. In 1994 about 30 percent of the officer corps was Russian; the commander was General Valentin Luk'yanov, a Ukrainian.

### ***Air and Air Defense Forces***

Because of expense and military doctrine, Kyrgyzstan has not developed its air capability; a large number of the MiG-21 interceptors that it borrowed from Russia were returned in 1993, although a number of former Soviet air bases remain available. In 1996 about 100 decommissioned MiG-21s remained in Kyrgyzstan, along with ninety-six L-39 trainers and sixty-five helicopters.

The air defense forces have received aid from Russia, which has sent military advisory units to establish a defense system. Presently Kyrgyzstan has twenty-six SA-2 and SA-3 surface-to-air missiles in its air defense arsenal.

### ***Border Troops***

In 1992 a Kyrgyzstani command took over the republic's directorate of the KGB's Central Asian Border Troops District, which had about 2,000 mostly Russian troops. In late 1992, alarmed by the possibility of penetration of the border from Tajikistan and China, Russia established a joint Kyrgyzstani-Russian Border Troop Command, under Russian command. However, that force has been plagued with desertions by Kyrgyz troops, about 200 of whom fled to China in 1993. Border troop bases are located at Isfara, Naryn, and Karakol.

### ***Training***

Cadets and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in the ground forces are trained at the Bishkek Military School, which played the same role in the Soviet era. Under a 1993 agree-

ment, a small number of ground forces cadets study at Russian military schools, with the specific goal of bolstering the ethnic Kyrgyz officer corps. Small groups of Kyrgyz cadets also attend military schools in Uzbekistan and Turkey. Officers selected for higher commands attend a three-year course at Frunze Military Academy in Moscow and other Russian military academies.

For the air force, the main training site is the Bishkek Aviation School, once a major center for training foreign air cadets but reduced in 1992 to a small contingent of mostly Kyrgyz cadets. In 1992 Kyrgyzstan had five training regiments using 430 aircraft, but that number was depleted by the mid-1990s. A 1994 agreement calls for some Kyrgyz pilots to attend air force schools in Russia.

### **Internal Security**

In the early and mid-1990s, preservation of internal security against a variety of crimes, and especially against growing commerce in narcotics, became an extremely difficult task. White-collar crime and government corruption have added to the atmosphere of social disorder.

### ***Security Troops***

In 1991 President Akayev abolished the Kyrgyzstan branch of the KGB and replaced it with the State Committee for National Security, whose role subsequently was prescribed in a 1992 law. In 1996 the armed force of the committee, the National Guard, was an elite force of 1,000 recruited from all national groups in Kyrgyzstan. Organized in two battalions, the National Guard has been commanded since its inception by a Kyrgyz general; the chief of the border troops also is under that commander. The National Guard has the prescribed function of protecting the president and government property and assisting in natural disasters; except under exceptional circumstances, its role does not include maintenance of domestic order.

### ***Police***

The republic's police system is largely unchanged from the Soviet era. Still called "militia," the police are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A force estimated at 25,000 individuals, the militia is commanded by the Central Police Force in Bishkek. The republic's police have suffered the same large-scale resignations because of low pay and bad working conditions as have other former Soviet republics lack-

ing resources to support internal security. In April 1995, the national power company shut off power to the Central Police Force headquarters for nonpayment of electric bills, leaving the capital without even emergency police service for five hours. The poor equipment of the police further hampers their ability to respond to crimes. Police personnel frequently have been implicated in crime. Nearly 700 police were caught in the commission of crimes in the two months after President Akayev replaced the entire administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1995.

### *Crime*

Kyrgyzstan's crime problem is generally regarded as out of control. In 1994 more than 40,000 crimes were reported, or more than one crime per 100 citizens, and a high percentage of those crimes were classified as serious.

Petty crime touches every sector of the economy. For example, although cellular telephone networks and satellite linkups have been established in Bishkek, telecommunications elsewhere have grown much worse because the theft and resale of cable has become common. Power outages are frequent for the same reason, and any sort of equipment with salvageable metal is said to be quickly stripped if left unattended.

Foreigners are not exempt from crime, as they were in the Soviet era. In 1994 some 185 crimes against foreigners were registered in Bishkek. Most of these crimes were apartment burglaries, although beatings and armed robberies also have been reported. In April 1995, a small bomb was left in front of a Belgian relief mission's door, and "Foreigners Out of Bishkek" was painted on the wall opposite.

President Akayev vowed to crack down on crime in the mid-1990s, proposing much stiffer penalties for common crimes, including life imprisonment for auto theft. One sign of his seriousness was the replacement in January 1995 of the entire senior staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The new minister, the Kyrgyz Modolbek Moldashev, served in the Soviet KGB and lived most of his life outside the republic. When he took office, Moldashev brought in his own people from the State Committee for National Security and the Ministry of Defense. However, it is far from clear that Kyrgyzstan's security organizations are capable of cracking down on the drug-driven sector of the economy, and experts predict that if narcotics escape control, the spiral of criminal activities will continue to grow.



Government corruption and malfeasance also contribute to an atmosphere of lawlessness. In the mid-1990s, bribery, kick-backs, and influence peddling became increasingly common in government agencies. Law enforcement officials have received little cooperation from legislators in punishing their colleagues who are caught violating the law. In 1993 the Interregional Investigative Unit, established to combat bribery, found itself shut down after twenty successful investigations and replaced by an economic crimes investigation unit, some members of which began taking bribes themselves.

### *Narcotics Control*

Perhaps the most lucrative, and certainly the most problematic, of Kyrgyzstan's exports is narcotics, particularly opium and heroin. Government officials believe that the narcotics industry presents the greatest challenge to the internal security of Kyrgyzstan because of its capacity to destabilize the country.

In the Soviet era, the Kyrgyz Republic was a legal producer of opium, with about 2,000 hectares of land planted to poppies in 1974, the last year before world pressure forced such farms to be closed. At that point, an estimated 16 percent of the world's opium came from Kyrgyzstan. The country's climate is exceptionally well suited to cultivation of opium poppies and wild marijuana, producing unusually pure final products from both types of plant. Kyrgyzstan is said to produce even better poppies than does nearby Afghanistan, which has surpassed Burma as the world's leading supplier of heroin.

In 1992 Kyrgyzstan applied to the World Health Organization for permission to reinstitute the production of medicinal opium as a means of generating desperately needed revenue. The plan was to increase the planting in the northeastern Ysyk-Köl area to about 10,000 hectares and to open plantations in Talas and Naryn as well, yielding a projected annual profit of about US\$200 million. Under pressure from the world community, the plan was dropped.

In 1992 republic narcotics police uncovered thirteen drug-refining laboratories and seized two tons of ready narcotics. The police reported that drug-related crime rose 222 percent from 1991 to 1992 and that 830 people had been arrested on drug-distribution charges. Another report indicated that 70 percent of the 44,000 crimes reported in the republic in 1992 had a connection to drugs in one way or another. At that time, the head of the country's narcotics police estimated that only

about 20 percent of the narcotics traffic was being interdicted, mainly because resources are very inadequate. Government officials fear that this industry will continue to grow, especially in the absence of large-scale international assistance; in 1994 Russia ceased its cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in narcotics interdiction. An emerging distribution chain moves opium to Moscow, then to Poland, from where it is transferred to Europe and the United States.

Osh is said to have become a major new international point-of-purchase for opium and heroin, which is produced in all of the countries adjoining the Fergana Valley, including Kyrgyzstan. More than 300 kilograms of opium were seized in Osh Province in 1994, an amount estimated to be less than 10 percent of the total moving through Osh. At the end of 1994, the head of the National Security Committee characterized the narcotics trade as the republic's sole growth industry, which he warned was solidifying its grip on the republic's conventional economy.

### *Court System*

The court system remains essentially unchanged from the Soviet era. Nominally there are three levels in the court system: local courts, which handle petty crimes such as pickpocketing and vandalism; province-level courts, which handle crimes such as murder, grand larceny, and organized crime; and the Supreme Court, to which decisions of the lower courts can be appealed. However, there has been persistent conflict between Akayev and the legislature over the composition and authority of the Supreme Court, as well as over Akayev's choice of chief justice. As in the Soviet system, the office of the state procurator, chief civilian legal officer of the state, acts as both prosecuting attorney and chief investigator in each case.

The protections for individuals accused of crimes remain at the primitive level of Soviet law. According to law, the accused can be held for three days before a charge is made, and pretrial detention can last for as long as a year. There is no system of bail; the accused remains incarcerated until tried. Both the police and forces of the State Committee for National Security have the right to violate guarantees of privacy (of the home, telephone, mail, and banks), with the sanction of the state procurator. In theory search warrants and judicial orders for such things as wiretaps only are issued by authority of a judge; in practice this is not always done.

### **Prisons**

Very little current information is known about Kyrgyzstan's prison system. In the Soviet era, at least twelve labor camps and three prisons operated in the republic, including at least one uranium mine-labor camp in which prisoners worked without protective gear. The total prison capacity and present population are not known, but it may be presumed that prisons in Kyrgyzstan are suffering the same overcrowding as are prisons elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. The 1995 purge of the Ministry of Internal Affairs included appointment of a new head of the prison system, a colonel who had been assistant minister of internal affairs prior to the shakeup.

### **National Security Prospects**

Although internal stability has not been a serious problem during the Akayev era, events in the mid-1990s threatened to make it so. By 1995 economic hardship, to which international experts did not predict a rapid end, combined with insufficient internal security forces and the opportunity for profits from organized narcotics activities to threaten the stability of Kyrgyzstan's society, especially in the major urban centers of Bishkek and Osh. The high crime rate also interfered with plans to attract Western tourist trade.

Meanwhile, as of 1995 external security came exclusively from Russia, a situation that Kyrgyzstan officially welcomed in the absence of domestic resources to build a credible military force for its very small and isolated nation. As in the economic field, however, policy makers were not sure how long Russia would view strong support of Kyrgyzstan's national security as an important element of Russian foreign policy. Although no major regional threat loomed in the mid-1990s, major policy questions remained unanswered.

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A useful reference for general historical background is *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, edited by Edward Allworth and revised in 1994. The Kyrgyzstan chapter of Martha Brill Olcott's *Central Asia's New States* is a concise description of the republic's status in the post-Soviet world. Several publications of the World Bank provide detailed information about social and economic developments in the 1990s. Among the most

useful are those entitled *Kyrgyz Republic: Economic Report*; *Kyrgyz Republic: Agricultural Sector Review*; *Kyrgyz Republic: Energy Sector Review*; and *Kyrgyzstan: Social Protection in a Reforming Economy*. For general background on Kyrgyz society and customs, the government's *Discovery of Kyrgyzstan* is a valuable source. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)