



Central Asia and the Caucasus

Pillars of Aid Building an Independent Country

The countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus are facing major problems on their paths to nation-building. Under socialism, dependency on the Soviet Union and strong central government were fostered, and a clear division of industries existed between the individual countries. This now means that much of the societal and industrial infrastructure* required by independent nations is lacking. Consequently, there is a need for many reforms, including abandoning the former system, the establishment of democratic institutions and, the adoption of a market economy. At present, there is a shortage of people sufficiently qualified to push these reforms through.

To support nation-building and stable development in the countries of Central Asia

and the Caucasus, JICA is providing cooperation with emphasis on policy advice aimed at implementing a market economy, human resources development, and the upgrading of basic infrastructure.

Since independence, various problems have arisen that were scarcely considered during the Soviet era. Environmental problems are particularly serious. One typical example is the ongoing salt damage and shrinkage of the Aral Sea. Too much water has been drained in an absolutely unplanned and uncoordinated manner from the rivers that flow into the Aral Sea, rivers that have become international since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is a characteristic example of a problem caused by the large-scale and inefficient systems in opera-

tion during the days of the Soviet Union. Such problems are becoming increasingly complex. In order to tackle environmental problems in this region, JICA has dispatched experts for environmental monitoring and is cooperating on specific topics such as preservation of biological diversity*.

Various problems have arisen on account of the rapid changes that have been occurring within society, but JICA is placing particular importance on efforts in the health and medical care sector closely linked to civil life. Cooperation will continue to be provided to upgrade infrastructure from the Soviet era, which is increasing inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Current State of Development

■ Path of the Silk Road

Central Asia consists of the five countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, while the Caucasus comprises the three countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. These two areas are located in the center of the Eurasian continent; combined, they cover an area of 4.2 million km² and have a population of around 70 million. This is a strategic location on the Silk Road that has historically linked east and west. The northern part of the area witnessed constant territorial conflicts among the nomadic peoples who lived there. After being under the rule of the Russian Empire in the 19th century, the countries in this region formed part of the Soviet Union from the 1920s onward, but they gained their independence when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.

People of many different ethnic backgrounds, including Iranians, Turks, and Mongolians, have lived in this area since ancient times. Slavs, including Russians, settled the area in early modern times and Germans and Koreans were forced to emigrate here in the Soviet era. This area today has a complex ethnic mix.

In terms of religion, although the five countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan have been reverting to Islam, each country has adopted the principle of separation of politics and religion so that Islamic rules are not strictly imposed. In contrast, Armenia and Georgia are dominated by the Christianity of the Armenian and Georgian orthodox churches, and both countries have their own languages and cultures.

■ Toward True Self-sufficiency

All the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus must dismantle the system imposed by the former Soviet Union, and establish the political and economic systems they require as independent nations. The basic indices relating to education, health care and social services are generally high in comparison with other so-called developing countries. However, since independence, the inefficiencies of the planned economic system that was applied during the former Soviet Union era, the deterioration of facilities and machinery, inadequate maintenance control, insufficient energy, and division of industrial relationships due to the collapse of the former Soviet economic zone, have led to disunity across their societies and economies. A priority for these countries is therefore to estab-

lish systems and structures appropriate for their status as truly independent countries.

Each country is continuing with efforts aimed at moving from a planned economy to a market economy. However, 10 years have passed since independence, and differences in the speed and progress of transition are becoming clear. Certain results have been achieved on the macroeconomic front, but the gross national products (GNP) of almost all the countries have not recovered to the levels they were at the time these countries achieved independence. Nation-building must take place in parallel with economic reconstruction for the recovery and betterment of the economy and living standards of the people.

■ Diversifying Political and Economic Conditions

As regards economic reform, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the three countries of the Caucasus are moving firmly in the direction of price liberalization, privatization, deregulation, trade liberalization, and other types of structural reform in line with the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. However, the economic disparities between the countries are becoming more and more apparent, as is evident in the conditions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While Kazakhstan has been showing steady economic growth thanks to oil development in the Caspian Sea, which has started to become profitable recently, the mountainous landlocked country of Kyrgyzstan suffers from large debts. On the other hand, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are distancing themselves from these radical reform programs and following their own distinctive paths. In January 2002,



Kazakhstan Japanese Speech Contest held at Kazakhstan Japan Center

Uzbekistan commenced a new program in line with an IMF proposal, but has not really launched basic economic reforms, such as the abolishment of exchange rate control and trade control systems. Tajikistan has embarked upon economic reform for sustainable development* after going through difficulties with reconstruction following years of civil war.

Agriculture is the main industry in this region. Central

Asia, most of which generally has a dry climate, is promoting structural reforms in order to be free from the monoculture of cotton production that relied on large-scale irrigation systems during the Soviet era. The Caucasus mainly falls within the Mediterranean climatic zone and farming occurs in line with the climatic and natural conditions of each territory. The region as a whole has a plentiful supply of mineral resources

Front Line

● Kazakhstan

Technical Cooperation for the Improvement of Health Care Services in the Semipalatinsk Region (in the Republic of Kazakhstan)

Easing the Pain of Victims of Nuclear Testing

Technical Cooperation Project

A mushroom cloud in the sky of plain

Semipalatinsk City, located in the northeastern part of the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a typical medium-sized Russian city with a population of 300,000 living on a large plain. Dostoevsky, the great 19th century Russian writer, once lived in this city.

In the area surrounding Semipalatinsk City, there are numerous nuclear testing grounds from the Soviet era, and from 1949 to 1989, about 470 nuclear tests were reportedly conducted. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union were busy with nuclear development. Residents of a village located only 38km away from a testing ground were not given any explanation as to what the mushroom clouds in the sky and the mysterious lights on the horizon really were. The health conditions of residents who were continuously exposed to radiation for as long as 40 years were seriously damaged. Even now, approximately 300,000 people are estimated to be suffering from the aftereffects of radiation exposure.

Utilizing the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Following the unanimous consent for

support for Semipalatinsk at the 52nd UN General Meeting in 1997, an international conference regarding support for Semipalatinsk was held in Tokyo in 1999. At this conference, Japan, the only country ever to suffer from an atomic attack, declared that it would provide medical support for residents of Semipalatinsk utilizing the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and results of previous support for atomic bomb sufferers so that they are at least able to lead healthy and culturally humane lives.

Consequently, in July 2000, a regional medical care improvement planning project for Semipalatinsk commenced for the purpose of improving regional medical care and support the early detection of leukemia and cancers caused by radiation exposure. Under this project, Japanese experts and their counterparts* are conducting health check ups of residents using equipment such as a health check vehicles provided with Japan's grant aid. More than 15 Japanese experts annually are dispatched under this project, providing various kinds of technical advice as well as the above-mentioned health checks.

The technical advice includes diagnostic



An expert (on the far right) discusses radiation diagnosis in Semipalatinsk.

techniques, such as in-depth examination and confirmation examination for examinees with comments and data analysis methods regarding data collected. These diagnostic results are then collected as data and analyzed so that they can be reflected in future administrative policies.

The whole world, including various international organizations, is paying attention to this area, where the damage of nuclear testing is unprecedentedly serious. Japanese experts' dedication to their operations for improving the health of the residents has been widely accepted by local residents and highly praised by the world.

(Regional Department II, East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus Division)

including petroleum, natural gas, zinc, tin, and rare metals, including uranium and radium, and there are several countries where primary manufacturing industries are well developed. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan (petroleum for both), and Turkmenistan (natural gas) are rich in energy resources and have strong confidence in developing their respective resources and in establishing export routes. On the other hand, as a country without its own resources, Georgia is attempting to establish a role for itself as a conveyance route for energy.

In international relations, all these countries except a few, including Tajikistan, kept their respective distance from Russia until June 2001, when four countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with China and Russia, and agreed to promote neighborly relations among members, cooperate in a wide range of fields including politics and economics, and work together for regional security and

stability. With the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent air strikes in Afghanistan, the region passed a big turning point in terms of national security. Threats from radical and extremist Muslims, such as the Taliban faded, and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, offered military bases to US and European forces, strengthening the relationship between each country and the United States. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, has tended to take an independent course of diplomacy, which has resulted in being isolated internationally in many fields.

In the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Georgia are strengthening their links with the West, particularly in connection with petroleum development, whereas Armenia is allying itself with Russia in security matters. In addition, Azerbaijan and Armenia continue to dispute possession of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave.

Addressing Priority Issues in JICA Programs

Supporting Self-sufficiency among the Newly Independent States

In July 1997, Japan's then prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, announced "Eurasia Diplomacy" in Central Asia and the Caucasus, referred to as "Silk Road Region," thus strengthening economic cooperation and resources development cooperation. Among such efforts, technical cooperation has drawn much attention. JICA has provided cooperation in four main areas with the aim of supporting self-sufficient development in this region, namely: (1) support for transition to a market economy; (2) socioeconomic infrastructure development centering on transportation and communications; (3) cooperation with social sectors such as health and medical care and education; and (4) conservation of the environment.

Support for a transition to a market economy has been taking the form of advice on macroeconomic and economic development planning policies, master plans on specific topics such as the promotion of small and medium-scale enterprises and banking systems, and intensive technical cooperation. In the field of socioeconomic infrastructure, JICA has cooperated on the upgrading of railways, roads, airports, and water supply systems. In social sectors, institutional reforms in the health and medical care field and policy support on education reforms and maintenance of equipment are under way.

JICA has also provided technical cooperation to support conservation of the environment. Other areas of cooperation include basic industries such as agriculture and mining.

In Tajikistan, cooperation has been limited to the acceptance of training participants for supporting the transition to a market economy and democratization. However as peace-building after the civil war has progressed and internal security has been recovered following the collapse of Taliban controls in its southern neighbor, Afghanistan, with which



Exchange party between local citizens and NPO from Mitaka City at Uzbekistan Japan Center

Tajikistan has a strong relationship, full-scale cooperation has been developing, including the dispatch of personnel starting in 2002. Support for poverty alleviation and social sectors in the country, whose economy has fallen to the poorest level due to the influence of civil war, are under consideration.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Japan Centers* have been set up in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan to continuously offer business courses aimed at developing practical human resources that will contribute to the transition to a market economy, and to provide Japanese language courses and information on Japan aimed at increasing local awareness of Japan.

■ Review of Priority Areas

Because differences in progress and priorities have begun to emerge clearly after 10 years of independence in the region, based on the results of a one-year study by the Study Committee for Development Assistance to Central Asia in 1999, JICA reviewed priority areas for cooperation with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan to provide more appropriate cooperation for each country. Since the economic

disparities between rural areas and the capital or large cities have become wider in each country, cooperation for closing regional disparities has been a recent focus, including cooperation for regional development and extension of volunteer activities to rural areas.

■ Further Efforts to Bolster Security

The underlying ethnic and religious makeup of this region is complex. Unstable political conditions following the collapse of the Soviet Union have led to terrorist activities, civil war, and conflict in some countries of the region. In fact, several incidents involving Japanese aid personnel have occurred in this region: the shooting in 1998 of United Nations personnel, including Yutaka Akino (a Japanese official who was in Tajikistan as a member of a United Nations inspection team), and the abduction in 1999 of Japanese engineers in Kyrgyzstan. Although conditions have shown some improvement in recent years, utmost vigilance is called for due to the activities of Islamic fundamentalist forces. In order to proceed with cooperation in the region, JICA is planning to give further consideration to public order and security measures.



Discussion on regional development of Issyk-Kul Lake, a tourist attraction in Kyrgyzstan