Book Review

Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan

Rafis Abazov

The Scarecrow Press: Lanham, Maryland, 2004, 416pp.

Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan

Rafis Abazov

The Scarecrow Press: Lanham, Maryland, 2005, 240pp.

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Comparative economists called on to travel and study, perhaps even advise, in some smaller countries of Asia usually need a rapid way to familiarize themselves with these lesser known, but often significant, states. A very efficient introduction is provided by Rafis Abazov's two historical dictionaries, part of a series of 53 volumes, now including such countries as Papua New Guinea, Syria, and Laos. Like the others, Abazov's two volumes include a short history, maps, data tables, bibliography, and about 300 entries on personalities, cities, concepts, and so forth. His survey of the Kyrgyz economy before and during its transition was objective, fair, and accurate.

Obviously, such bound volumes cannot be completely up-to-date. For example, the newly formed (1999) and newsworthy Batken province of Kyrgyzstan, from which incursions into Uzbekistan were launched, is mentioned but omitted from the map. Data in the Turkmenistan volume, dubious as they are, stop in the late 1990s. However, most of the main figures in the recent Kyrgyz events are included. The career of the megalomaniac President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, is described over two pages with admirable restraint.

Rafis Abazov is one of our best qualified experts on Central Asia. A graduate of both the Kyrgyz National University and a candidates' degree from Moscow, he has written widely on Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as the two countries covered in these short dictionaries. At present Abazov is adjunct professor at the Harriman Institution of Columbia University.

Before any serious venture into the economies of countries like these, a historical dictionary like those provided by Rafis Abazov should be in your luggage.

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