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Uzbekistan Closes Borders Before International Summit

By The Moscow Times

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Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov (R) and Russian President Vladimir Putin

Uzbekistan will temporarily close its border with four of its neighboring countries, the Uzbek State Border Service said in a statement Wednesday.

People, vehicles and goods from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and will be unable to enter the country between June 15 and June 25.

While authorities gave no official reason for the move, local media have reported that the closure is to ensure the security of the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, the Interfax news agency reported.

The annual SCO meeting will take place this year in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent on June 23-24. The group, which describes itself as promoting regional cooperation and security, is seen by some Western observers as a counterbalance to NATO. Founded in 2001, the SCO

includes Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan are expected to join as full members by the end of 2016.

Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan remains officially open, although under heavy guard. The area is considered to be one of the most heavily fortified borders in the world, and is flanked by two barbed wire fences, one of which is electrified, and land mines.

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