

# Tajikistan *Historical Windows*

By Nandini Bhattacharya

- 1) Tajikistan became a sovereign nation after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. September 9, 1991 is celebrated as the country's Independence Day. Modern Tajikistan shares its boundaries with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and China.
- 2) Russia, in the nineteenth century, and then the USSR in the twentieth century formerly controlled what is now Tajikistan. In 1929, Tajikistan, which was then a part of Uzbekistan, became one of fifteen autonomous Soviet Republics. Samarkand and Bukhara, two cities of enormous historic value, remained with Uzbekistan as part of the Soviet nationalities policy.<sup>1</sup>
- 3) Soviet authorities created the present capital city Dushanbe, which means Monday, from an obscure local township where weekly markets took place on Mondays.
- 4) In the past, Tajikistan was a part of the historical region of Khorasan, which was a diverse area with many different ethnic groups. Ismail Somoni, the famous sovereign who ruled from Bukhara, has become a national icon. The Tajik currency and the country's highest mountain peak are named after him.<sup>2</sup>
- 5) The majority of Tajiks follow Sunni Islam. People living in the Pamir mountain region in the south follow Ismaili tradition (a branch of Shi'ism). A handful of Jews, some Christians, and a few Buddhists constitute minority communities.
- 6) Unexpected independence plunged Tajikistan into a bitter and prolonged civil war between the North (including Dushanbe, Khojen, Quliyab, Hissar) and South (Gorno-Badakhshan) from 1992 to 1997. However, the government co-opted the opposition and survived. However, partially because of the lingering economic and social effects of the conflict, Tajikistan remains the poorest of all Central Asian states. Many young people leave the country to find work, especially in Russia and Kazakhstan.
- 7) The country is known for a rich Persian-based art, literature, and music and post-Soviet cinema success.
- 8) The Tajik government restored a forty-two foot long image of Buddha, which was discovered in the Soviet period but kept away from viewers. It is currently displayed at the Museum of Antiquity as the largest existing image of Buddha in Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> The restored image is a reminder of Tajikistan's rich heritage as a center of commercial and cultural exchange through the historic Silk Routes.

## NOTES

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1. Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia* (New York University Press: New York and London, 2007): 178
2. William O. Beeman, "The Struggle for Identity in Post-Soviet Tajikistan," *MERIA, Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal* Volume 3, no. 4- December 1999
3. *Deccan Herald*, April 15, 2013,

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