



Kazakh President: Central Asia Should Remain a Region of Cooperation

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – During the Nur Otan Party's 17th congress on Jan. 29, President Nursultan Nazarbayev placed great emphasis on the stability of Central Asia necessary to pursue peace and security.

"Kazakhstan once again calls on its Central Asian neighbours to resume multilateral cooperation formats. This will strengthen the economic and geopolitical potentials of the entire region. We will do everything possible to strengthen the process of Eurasian integration. I would unequivocally say that the Nur Otan party has positioned itself as a party of Eurasian optimists," said the Kazakh President.

Nazarbayev also noted that in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, it is important to implement consistent steps to establish a common market.

"Kazakhstan will take part in China's Silk Road Economic Belt. We have already signed a joint pro-



President Nursultan Nazarbayev speaks at the 17th congress of Nur Otan Party.

gramme for creation of enterprises with Chinese capital in chemical, metallurgical, energy and transport industries as well as mechanical engineering. Kazakhstan initiated a new large-scale idea to open Eurasia," said the President.

The head of state recalled the signing by Kazakhstan of agreements on enhanced partnership and cooperation with the European Union (EU) and its accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). He also drew attention to the fact

that Kazakhstan will strengthen its strategic partnership with Russia, China, the United States, the European Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States and its Central Asian neighbours.

Moreover, Nazarbayev highlighted that nowadays in the age of new threats to security, the country calls on the international community to restore global confidence.

"We urge all countries to unite in order to eliminate threats of the spread and improvement of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism. This has to be done today so that tomorrow our children and grandchildren could live in peace," added the President.

Nazarbayev set March 20 as the date for the early parliamentary election. The previous parliamentary election in January 2012 led to the three-party Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) with the ruling Nur Otan party holding the overwhelming majority out of 107 seats.

Kazakh-Turkish Bilateral Relations Discussed in Astana



By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – The main directions of bilateral cooperation, such as strengthening political dialogue and a cultural exchange, development of relations in the field of transport, energy, tourism and infrastructure were discussed during Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu official visit to Kazakhstan on Feb. 6, the Akorda press office reported.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev noted that this visit shows the importance of Turkey for Kazakhstan's foreign policy.

"This year, Kazakhstan will celebrate the 25th anniversary of its independence. From the first days of our sovereignty, we have been making every effort to bring closer our fraternal peoples. By working closely over the years with the leadership of your country, we have restored ties between Kazakhstan and Turkey. I became an initiator of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States. There is a Turkic Academy in Astana, where scientists are exploring common culture and history of both countries. The value of Turkey is very large for Kazakhstan, and we will never give up our cooperation," said Nazarbayev.

He also emphasised that growing geopolitical tensions around Turkey has an impact on Kazakhstan. "Today, it is necessary to continue the search for new ways out of the prevailing situation. Many of the causes of the events remain unclear. The conflicts in Syria and Iraq have shown a lack of unity among Muslims. We have become closer to a time of a conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, which was earlier predicted by the West. The crisis in relations between Turkey and Russia has become a big concern for Kazakhstan. The two countries are our important allies and partners," highlighted the Kazakh President.

In turn, Davutoğlu maintained that he always regards trips to Kazakhstan as coming to his home. He congratulated Kazakhstan on its 25th anniversary of independence and praised Nazarbayev for his contribution to the strengthening of bilateral relations.

"Relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey are intensively developing in all directions. We have implemented joint projects in transport, energy and other fields. And trade relations have been strengthening. If Turkey is a gateway for Kazakhstan to Europe, Kazakhstan for Turkey is the way to Eurasia," Davutoğlu said during his talks with Nazarbayev.

He also emphasised that growing geopolitical tensions around Turkey has an impact on Kazakhstan. "Today, it is necessary to continue the search for new ways out of the prevailing situation. Many of the causes of the events remain unclear. The conflicts in Syria and Iraq have shown a lack of unity among Muslims. We have become closer to a time of a conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, which was earlier predicted by the West. The crisis in relations between Turkey and Russia has become a big concern for Kazakhstan. The two countries are our important allies and partners," highlighted the Kazakh President.

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Kazakh Economy Improves Ranking on Index of Economic Freedom

By Julia Rutz

Kazakhstan climbed one place from last year's position in the annual ranking of the Index of Economic Freedom, reported the Washington-based Heritage Foundation. In the global ranking, the Central Asia's largest economy is 68th out of 178, while in the Asia-Pacific region Kazakhstan is in 12th place.

The current status of Kazakhstan was evaluated as a country with a moderately free economy. Among major achievements named were trade freedom and management of public finance.

According to the authors of the study, the Kazakh government promised large-scale privatisation reforms in the coming years, however, the implementation progress of these reforms is not obvious yet. The country's significant problems remain the

need for economy diversification and the reduction of its dependence on exports. Moreover, the study highlighted four further problem zones of the Kazakh economy: the rule of law, limited government, regulatory efficiency and open markets.

Concerning the rule of law, the study marks a high level of corruption at all levels of government, as well as throughout the judicial system. More successful government is needed to improve the public dept, which now composes about 15 percent of GDP. This is especially vital in the current situation when large oil revenues can't keep the budget balanced any longer.

According to the report, Kazakhstan also has burdensome licensing requirements for running a business, as well as erratic enforcement of the labour code. Despite the fact that Kazakhstan became the 162nd member of the World Trade Organisation in 2015, the matter of open markets

remains unsolved. Local content requirements and sectoral barriers impede foreign investment and the number of non-performing loans in three largest banks remains high.

At 68th, this year Kazakhstan is ranked between Thailand and the State of Samoa. The country has left behind such countries as France (75th), Saudi Arabia (78th), Italy (86th), Brazil (122nd), China (144th), Russia (153th), Belarus (157th) and Ukraine (162nd).

The ranking's leaders remain the same as in the previous year – Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand. The top ten of world free economies also included Australia, Switzerland, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Estonia and Great Britain.

The Index of Economic Freedom is calculated on the basis of ten factors ranked on a numeric scale from zero to 100. The principles of economic freedom include property rights, freedom

from corruption, fiscal freedom, control of government spending, business freedom, labour freedom, monetary freedom, trade freedom, investment freedom and financial freedom. Kazakhstan has participated in the ranking since 1997.

The Index of Economic Freedom is the annual measure of economic freedom around the world. It is published jointly by The Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal. In 2014, the ranking marked its 20th anniversary of existence.

According to Ryan Olson, a research assistant in the Centre for International Trade and Economics at The Heritage Foundation, the Index has the potential to be a vital tool for a large constituency, from investors to students to policymakers and beyond. With the help of this tool, individuals can improve their businesses, advocate good public policies and help build a society where freedom and prosperity flourish.

Nazarbayev Urges Intensification of Foreign Economic Activities

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – President Nursultan Nazarbayev placed great emphasis on strengthening the economic component in the work of Ka-

zakhstan's Foreign Ministry and its missions abroad at an extended board meeting on Feb. 3.

Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, Minister of Investment and Development Asset Issekeshev, Chairman of Astana EXPO 2017

Akhmetzhan Yessimov and the Kazakh ambassadors in more than 60 countries joined the meeting.

The head of state recalled that the ministry was created a quarter-century ago when the country was under difficult conditions. Nazarbayev

highly appreciated the contribution of the diplomats and expressed gratitude for their work aimed at strengthening the independence of the state and developing the foreign policy of the country.

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President Nursultan Nazarbayev (C) poses for a group photo with top Kazakh foreign ministry officials and ambassadors abroad.

EBRD Advises Kazakhstan to Focus on Preparing for Better Times

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan's economic growth rates will remain low and the impact of the negative environment is intensifying while structural reforms are slowly advancing, according to a recent analysis by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The projections for the country's economic condition in 2016 were reviewed in the EBRD Transition Report for 2015-2016 and regional economic prospects presentation held Jan. 26 in the capital's Economic Research Institute (ERI). The bank's leading economists gather at the ERI each year in late January.

The Kazakh economy has been hit by collapsing oil prices – close to a 70-percent loss since the beginning of 2014 and continued weakening in 2016, said EBRD Associate Director and regional lead economist Dr. Agris Preimanis in his report "Kazakhstan and the Wider Central Asia Region: Heightened Risks."

In addition, Kazakhstan and the wider Central Asia region are fac-

ing a difficult external environment in the form of declining prices for gold, lead, copper, aluminium and gas; the difficult economic outlook in Russia such as continued recession and a collapsing rouble that has lost half its value since 2014 and is continuing to fall as well as challenges in China involving the slowdown of the country's economic growth and currency weakening of a 6-percent depreciation against the dollar since the beginning of 2016.

Significant stock market volatility is also being observed, as the Shanghai Stock Exchange index lost 15 percent in January 2016 following a 30-percent decline from June to December 2015, according to the report.

"All those factors are new economic realities in which preparing for better times needs to be the main focus," said Preimanis.

The impulse for growth may come from some external factors such as increasing Chinese investment, slow gradual recovery in commodity prices, the New Silk Road Economic Belt and the Eurasian Economic Union.

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ELECTION 2016

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Nur Otan Party Adopts New Election Programme

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – The Nur Otan Party adopted a new election programme, “Kazakhstan-2021: Unity. Stability. Creation,” during its 17th congress chaired by Kazakh President and the party leader Nursultan Nazarbayev and held Jan. 29 at the Palace of Independence. The programme is based on the Plan of the Nation of 100 Concrete Steps to implement the five institutional reforms.

“We support our working population through implementation of the Employment Roadmap-2020 Programme. There is no place for unemployment in Kazakhstan. We have all the resources in place to avoid it,” said Nazarbayev, discussing unemployment problems in the world. “Two hundred fifty million people are unemployed worldwide. Some 1.7 billion people are capable of working, but only 1.2 billion have permanent jobs.”

He added nearly 400,000 new jobs will be created across the country under the Nurlı Zhol pro-

gramme projects in the upcoming years.

Nazarbayev called the congress a responsible and historic moment. He noted the party must make the necessary decisions on its participation in the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) elections, adding its 17-year leadership became the foundation of Kazakh economic and societal achievements. He indicated the total volume of the national economy grew 23 times, 28 new economic sectors have been created over the last six years and 890 new productions started operation. Kazakh companies now produce 400 new types of products and the per capita GDP increased 20 times in 17 years.

The President added the Parliament and government reacted wisely under the conditions of the global economic crisis. He cited state economic accomplishments such as the 1.3-time volume increase in the processing industry, share of Kazakh construction products reaching 72 percent, implementing major infrastructure projects and commissioning 30

million square metres of housing.

Nazarbayev said the whole world is observing the execution of the five institutional reforms, which requires the state apparatus to work technologically and effectively.

“A new three-stage selection system in the public service has been introduced and a full transition career model work is provided. The legislation excluded the possibility of [so called] team movements. New institutions of the authorised state bodies on ethics and anti-corruption monitoring were introduced for the first time,” he added.

Kazakhstan is the first nation activating five institutional reforms based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards. This is the key to success, noted the head of the state.

“The fifth reform enhances public accountability. Annual public reports of executives have already been introduced. It increases the transparency of government decision-making. Implementation

of the new evaluation system of state bodies started. An absolute goal for Kazakhstan is to achieve an international AAA rating. This is the highest level in the language of global business, which means that all financial obligations of Kazakhstan will be carried out in any economic and financial circumstances that will occur,” he said.

Nazarbayev pointed out the investment ombudsman is working to protect the rights of foreign investors and a visa-free regime for citizens of 19 countries was introduced. The Astana International Financial Centre will get tax benefits for its members and English law.

“The upcoming elections of deputies must pass openly, honestly and in a competitive struggle,” he said at the end of his comments.

The congress was attended by more than 2,000 government officials, heads of national holdings, social activists, professional athletes, scientific and cultural figures, representatives of NGOs and youth organisations as well as foreign diplomats and news media.

At the end of its proceedings, the congress voted to approve the list of 127 candidates to be included on its party list for the March 20 election.

The Mazhilis consists of 107 members, of which 98 are elected by the popular vote through party lists and nine are elected by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. In the previous convocation of the Mazhilis, dissolved by the President on Jan. 20, Nur Otan held 83 seats, while Ak Zhol Democratic Party held eight seats and Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan held seven.

Nur Otan’s new party list includes only 33 out of 83 former members of the Mazhilis, while the remainder is composed of top government officials, prominent athletes such as Ilya Ilyin, Genady ‘GGG’ Golovkin and Serik Sapiyev, as well as popular singers such as Kairat Nurtas and Zhanar Dugalova. It also includes several business executives such as Ivan Sauer, the founder and owner of Rodina dairy conglomerate.

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan’s Eurasia Agro and China’s COFCO plan to build export-oriented tomato paste processing plants in East Kazakhstan, Kyzylorda and West Kazakhstan regions, each of which will create approximately 1,000 new jobs, reported Forbes. COFCO Executive Director Sergazy Issembayev said Eurasia Agro has been included in the Kazakhstan-China cooperation programme in the industrialisation and investments fields, which plans to implement 52 projects. The financial part of the project and development strategy has already been approved. The parties will start construction of the first plant this year, which will have the capacity to make 4,000 tonnes of tomato paste per day to be exported to China and Europe.

A new steel factory will be constructed in South Kazakhstan this year, reported the region’s Akimat (governor’s office) press service. The factory, to be built in Ordabassy district in the Kazakh-Turkish industrial zone, will have an annual capacity of nearly 150,000 tonnes of pump housings and steel sheets. The products will be sold not only in the domestic market, but also exported in the near future, reported trend.az.

Senate Speaker Kassym-Jomart Tokayev held meetings Feb. 2 with Polish Ambassador Maciej Lang and Estonian Ambassador Jaan Reinhold accredited in Kazakhstan, reported the Senate’s press service. Tokayev and the diplomats discussed implementing the Plan of the Nation and five institutional reforms. He praised the amicable character of Kazakhstan-Polish and Kazakhstan-Estonian relations, fruitful dialogue between the Kazakh and European parliamentarians and constructive interaction within the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The Senate Speaker also called on Estonia and Poland to take part in the upcoming EXPO 2017 in Astana. Lang and Reinhold assured Tokayev they would facilitate further deepening of parliamentary, commercial, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties with Kazakhstan.

A flash mob devoted to World Cancer Day titled “We can! I can!” was held Feb. 4 in Astana, reported Kazinform. The flash mob, with participation from the staff of Astana Oncological Centre, was organised to draw attention to cancer and encourage its prevention, detection and treatment. World Cancer Day was founded by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC).

The Kazakh aviation industry and Air Defence Forces are putting the finishing touches on the first multi-functional aviation-technical centre, designed for assembly, repair and technical maintenance of aviation equipment and aircraft, reported inform.kz. The facility measures nearly 6,000 metres and operations are scheduled to start in May. The aviation-technical centre presentation will take place at the KADEX 2016 International Exhibition of Weapons Systems and Military Equipment. The centre is aimed at creating a high-technological production base to maintain and repair the Air Defence Forces equipment, including SU-30 battle planes and C-295, AN-26 and AN-72 military-transport aircraft. The facility will be staffed with technical specialists who have undergone special training.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) continues to support Kazakhstan’s green economy drive by financing a new, cleaner and more energy-efficient electricity generating plant in Atyrau, reported the bank’s press service. The EBRD is providing \$6.6 million for 5 years to Sagat Energy, a Kazakh private company. The loan will finance the remaining construction works and connection to the power transmission grid, as well as the commissioning and launch of Atyrau’s modern gas engine-based, 11-megawatt combined heat and power plant. Kazakhstan is currently dependent on coal for electricity production, but Atyrau region has domestic gas supply for power generation, which is significantly cleaner than coal in terms of CO2 emissions.

Ak Zhol Reiterates Pro-Business, Anti-Crisis Agenda

Staff Report

ASTANA – The Ak Zhol (Bright Path) Democratic Party of Kazakhstan approved a list of 35 candidates during its Feb. 3 congress. The slate will run in the March 20 early parliamentary election for seats in the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament).

Party chairman Azat Peruashev urged “pragmatism” and not nurturing “exaggerated expectations” to increase the presence Ak Zhol won four years ago. The party received 7.47 percent of the popular vote in 2012 and was subsequently allocated eight mandates in the lower chamber. Ak Zhol also won two seats in 2004 when only ten were up for grabs for party lists, with the rest contested by individual candidates.

The party’s main goal this time should not be chasing an “unrealistic” 20 or 30 mandates, but rather consolidating its position in Parliament, added Peruashev. A simple repetition of the previous result would prove the past

successes were not accidental and that the party had a stable foundation based on its own core of support among the voters, he argued.

The list of candidates included all eight Ak Zhol representatives in the previous convocation, including Peruashev, as well as fresh faces from business and academia. The chairman noted the party would not hold a “campaign of charm” involving celebrities, adding its run will be “active but decent, with no extra costs.”

“One of the reasons we did not invite any of them is [that we face] inflation and difficult conditions in general, when making a show out of our election campaign would be a mistake, an unnecessary irritant, which gives the opposite effect,” he said.

The congress also approved “Time to Work,” the party’s new 10-point electoral platform. Among the key provisions, Ak Zhol promises to continue prioritising the interests of small and medium business in the legislature, as well as promoting further expansion of the entrepreneurship spirit among wider segments

of the population. The platform also proposes improving the quality of the academic programme in schools and introducing an option for graduates to pass university entrance exams while skipping the currently mandatory Unified National Testing.

Additional priorities include increased executive transparency and accountability, a consolidated struggle against corruption and judicial and legal reforms.

“Our primary duty is to direct our intellectual and political resources to the development and implementation of urgent steps needed to address the impact of the global crisis on the national economy and business; protection of national interests and enterprises from [the negative effects of] the reduction of turnover; job cuts; protection of people from the threat of job loss, loss of revenue and even mass poverty,” according to the platform.

“A strong state is impossible without development of the economy and competitive business and business now is in dire need of our support,” said Peruashev.

Communists Nominate Twenty Two Candidates

Staff Report

ASTANA – Kazakhstan’s capital hosted the extraordinary congress of the Communist People’s Party (CPP) of Kazakhstan on Feb. 2. The congress delegates announced their programme for the March 20 general election and approved the list of the party’s nominees, which includes 22 names. Among them are deputies of the previous convocation of the Mazhilis (lower house of the Kazakh Parliament) Zhambyl Akhmetbekov, Aikyn Konurov and Vladislav Kosarev, as well as secretary of Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan Turgun Syzdykov, who was an unsuccessful candidate for the country’s latest presidential election in April 2015, among others.

“Our party was one of the initiators of the early election to the Mazhilis and maslikhats, which was later supported by President Nursultan Nazarbayev,” said Kosarev, who is also

the chairman of the party. “We have a challenging task that is to conduct a strong pre-election campaign. We need to meet the expectations of the voters and to enter the highest legislative body of the country, with new forces and ideas to strengthen the unity of the country.”

Another candidate of the party Tursunbek Omurzakov confirmed it looked to improve on its relative success at the latest parliamentary election in January 2012 by surpassing the 7 percent threshold and returning to the Mazhilis.

Earlier, Nur Otan, Auliy and Nationwide Social Democratic Party have announced their participation in the upcoming election and lists of their candidates.

The early election for the lower house of parliament is scheduled for March 20. On the same day, the election to maslikhats (local consultative councils) will take place.

Birlik Joins Election Race

Staff Report

ASTANA – On Feb. 5, the second extraordinary congress of Birlik (Unity) announced the party’s intention to run in the upcoming election for the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) and approved an eight-point electoral programme under the slogan “Clean intentions, clean actions, clean environment.”

The list of Birlik candidates for the Mazhilis includes eight people. Among them are the party chairman, businessman Serik Sultanali and his deputy, former Human Rights Ombudsman Bolat Baikadamov, while other, less known candidates come mainly from business and academic backgrounds.

Speakers at the congress said that even if there was not much time left to make a thorough preparation for the election, Birlik should make every effort to reach out with their electoral platform to as many voters as possible.

The party is positioning itself as a “party of social justice” that seeks to protect an individual from lawlessness by creating equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of social, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

“We stand for equal opportunities for everyone. We consider the resources of Kazakhstan as a public domain,” Sultangali said, calling it Birlik’s “fundamental difference from other parties.”

Birlik claims it will strive to create a “successful, just, spiritually rich society,” based on a “socially oriented economy” and “ethical principles that reflect traditions of the people of Kazakhstan,” vlast.kz reported.

If it makes it into the Mazhilis, Birlik wants to prioritise issues of environmental protection, focusing on the goal of “passing on to future generations a clean Kazakhstan with [well-preserved] flora and fauna.”

Economically, the party emphasises reforms aimed at shaping a more competitive economy and agriculture and a need to enhance the state-defined consumer basket by increasing it.

The Birlik party was created two years ago from the merger of the Adilet (Justice) Democratic Party and Rukhanyat (Spirituality) Party. The March 20 early parliamentary election is going to serve as the party’s first electoral test.

Auliy Party to Focus on Rural Development

By Aiman Turebekova

For a comprehensive solution to most problems of villages, the Auliy Social Democratic Party during its 12th congress on Feb. 1 considered it was needed to develop and implement the state programme Rural Infrastructure, providing integrated improvement for rural areas, such as development of social welfare services and engineering infrastructure of rural settlements.

During the congress, the party decided to participate in the March 20 parliamentary election and adopted its programme, “Bring Traditions to Auliy!” (auliy means village in Kazakh).

According to Chairman of the party Ali Bektauov, today’s top pri-

orities are the condition of villages and social well-being of villagers. He noted that about 8 million people or 45 percent of the population live in rural areas, so, an agricultural sector has to be engaged in the country’s modernisation programme.

Bektauov mentioned that, despite support measures taken by the government, there are still problems to be solved. “For instance, most of the domestic food products are produced by private farms, but they remain without the attention of central and local executive bodies. According to statistics, these farms are producing almost 72 percent of the total gross output of animal husbandry,” said Auliy chairman.

The party also raises issues on how to use land more efficiently

by applying modern innovation technologies as well as developing new varieties and breeds in livestock. “According to experts, Kazakhstan is able to export beef to Russia and China totaling about \$5 billion per year,” highlighted the leader of the party.

In addition, Auliy intends to solve problems of youth by increasing the number of houses for young families, reviving mass sports as well as providing moral education.

“We are the party of moral optimism, political constructivism and bright ideas,” Bektauov concluded.

The Auliy Social Democratic Party approved the list of 19 candidates to be included on its party list for the March 20 vote.

NSDP Seeks Participation in Parliamentary Election

Staff Report

ASTANA – The Nationwide Social Democratic Party (NSDP) ruled during its congress on Jan. 30 in Almaty that the party should seek participation in Kazakhstan’s early parliamentary election set for March 20.

The decision was approved by

a clear majority of 127 out of 135 delegates of the congress, NSDP Chairman Zharmakhan Tuyakbai announced, according to vlast.kz.

The decision was preceded by a wide intra-party discussion, review of the issue on the party’s political council as part of the Nationwide Civil Society Meeting, the party leaders said. The meeting of a number of NGOs that favoured the

NSDP’s participation took place a day prior.

The party should use the election campaign as a platform and opportunity to reach wider audiences with its political programme of change, the speakers at the congress said. Among them were former members of the Mazhilis and Senate Serikbolsyn Abdildin, Ualikhan Kaisarov and Zauresh

Battalova, former Vice-premier Baltash Tursymbayev and human rights lawyer Yevgeni Zhovtis.

The list of NSDP candidates for the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) approved by the congress features 28 names, including the party chairman, Zharmakhan Tuyakbai was the chairman of the lower house of parliament in 1999-2004 and unsuccessfully

ran in the presidential election in 2005.

Created in 2006, the NSDP twice participated in parliamentary elections, failing on both occasions to surpass the 7-percent threshold for parties to enter the Mazhilis (4.54 percent in 2007 and 1.68 in 2012). Since November 2015, the party has been a full member of Socialist International.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan Temir Zholy (KTZ) President Askar Mamin and Tajik Railways President Komil Mirzoali signed an agreement in Astana Jan. 27 pledging to continue their cooperation and extend KTZ's involvement in the modernisation of Tajikistan's railway network, Railways.kz reports. The agreement specifies that both companies will continue to work on the renewal of Tajikistan's railway fleet and the supply of wheelsets and turnouts. Kazakhstan steel mills will also supply rails to Tajikistan. Representatives from Tajik Railways also visited the Tulpar Talgo factory and the Lokomotiv Kurastyru Zauyty locomotive plant in Astana.

Chairman of the Senate Committee for International Relations, Defence and Security Ikram Adyrbekov met with a delegation from China's Communist Party Central Committee on Jan. 28, Inform.kz reports. Welcoming Deputy Head of the Development Problems Research Centre of the Chinese State Council Long Guoqiang, Adyrbekov, who had served as Kazakhstan's ambassador in Beijing, emphasised that building good relations with China is one of the most important foreign policy priorities for Astana. Guoqiang discussed China's internal policy and the main aspects of Chinese economic policy with the Kazakh counterpart.

The law "On ratification of the Protocol of amendments to the Convention between Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of evasion of taxes in regard to income and capital tax" was approved at the Senate's plenary session, Inform.kz reports. The protocol aims to expand cooperation between the states' tax services through the exchange of information on taxation to prevent the evasion of tax payment. The existing convention didn't allow the exchange of information on tax-related issues between Kazakh and Czech authorised bodies because both states had adopted laws on confidentiality of information. The protocol includes an article obliging the states to exchange information regardless of whether there is such a law or not.

The Kazakh Consumers Rights Protection Committee reported that according to the World Health Organisation, spreading of the Zika virus has been observed since April 2015 in Brazil, then in other South American countries. As of Jan. 27, the infection was registered in 27 countries. There is no vaccine or treatment against Zika virus. The committee warns Kazakhstan residents, especially pregnant women, to take this information into account while planning for travel and give up their trips, if possible.

Kazakhstan's trade turnover with members of the Customs Union has increased 1.6 times since the beginning of operation of the union, according to TASS. First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Bakhytzhah Sagintayev said that the establishment of the common economic space had a huge impact on Kazakhstan, allowing the country to significantly develop its internal market. Exports have also grown by 80 percent.

The 43rd session of the working group for developing the convention on the Caspian Sea's legal status took place in Ashgabat Jan. 27, according to Kazinform. The session was held at the level of Caspian states' deputy foreign ministers and included participation by Kazakh, Russian, Iranian and Azerbaijani delegations as well as the hosts, Turkmenistan. The session aims to continue the discussion on the convention's provisions related to the Caspian Sea's biological resources. On the first day of the meeting, the parties outlined their states' positions concerning the issue of legal status and various aspects of cooperation and discussed a wide range of issues of mutual interest.

Kazakhstan's Senate has adopted the law "On ratification of the Agreement between Kazakhstan and India on extradition of sentenced persons." The law regulates relations regarding the transfer of sentenced persons between the two states in order to allow sentences to be served in Kazakhstan. The agreement was signed in July 2015 in Astana and contains the conditions under which such decisions can be taken.

Russian, Kazakh Leaders Discuss Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations

Staff Report

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev and President of Russia Vladimir Putin discussed bilateral ties, the situation in Ukraine and the deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations in a Feb. 8 phone call.

Putin reiterated that the current tense state of affairs is Turkey's doing and it is Turkey who has to take steps to normalise the situation, the Akorda press service reported.

According to a TASS report, Nazarbayev earlier said the crisis had become "a big problem" for Kazakhstan. The Akorda report also noted that the two leaders agreed that bilateral cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia during this complex period will continue to be built based on confidence, traditional friendship and



The phone call with the Russian leader came on the heels of an official visit to Kazakhstan by

talks focused on developing trade, energy and transport cooperation. Davutoğlu said Turkey and Kazakhstan were poised to be the "two central countries of Eurasia," the Hurriyet Daily News and other sources reported.

Relations between Russia and Turkey have been strained since Turkey shot down a Russian military plane near the Syrian-Turkish border in late November, saying it violated Turkish airspace.

Reactions to the phone call with the Russian leader came on the heels of an official visit to Kazakhstan by Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Feb. 6, during which

good-neighborliness between the two nations.

President Nazarbayev Urges Intensification of Foreign Economic Activities

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"Today, our country has diplomatic relations with 169 countries; there are 60 foreign embassies and diplomatic missions covering 94 countries, more than 50 diplomatic missions of other states and international organisations operate in Kazakhstan. Many foreign policy initiatives have been implemented due to our diplomacy. Kazakhstan for the first time seeks a seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. In this regard, we hope to get support from countries with which we have friendly relations," said the President.

Furthermore, Nazarbayev stressed that Kazakhstan has initiated the creation of international organisations, such as the Com-

monwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In addition, he recalled that Kazakhstan hosted the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit, which was held for the first time in this century, and the 38th Session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference Council of Foreign Ministers.

"All this had a positive effect. Carrying out these activities led to the sounding of the name of our country in the international arena. At the same time, the challenges ahead are no less important. Therefore, taking into account our

achievements, today we have to think about the next steps," the Kazakh President concluded.

During the meeting, Idrissov noted that the foreign ministry intends to continue to make every effort to promote the foreign policy and economic interests of the country, to further develop the international authority of Kazakhstan and to strengthen bilateral cooperation with foreign states.

"Nowadays, Kazakhstan has a high international prestige. Congratulations on the results of the last presidential elections [received] from more than 90 heads of states and governments have become a clear confirmation of that. All of them expressed their support for your ongoing course of political and economic reforms as well as policy

First Test Train Passes the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route

By Julia Rutz

The first test container train following the route Ukraine-Georgia-Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan-China reached the Aktau port in Kazakhstan on Jan. 24, reported the press service of the Kazakhstan Temir Zholy National Company.

The train, which consists of 20 containers, operates in the framework of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route and connects three major ports on the Black and Caspian seas: Ilyichevsk (Ukraine), Batumi (Georgia), Alyat (Azerbaijan) and Aktau (Kazakhstan).

On the Kazakh territory, the train will pass the new railway line Zhezkazgan-Beineu-Saksaulskaya-Dostyk.

The KTZ Express, a subsidiary of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, stopped the train at the Zhanaarka station. In accordance with the Law on Railway Transport, the shipping payments should be made by the shipper and forwarding agent in advance, before the departure of goods. In this regard, the train stayed in Zhanaarka for two days and only after appropri-

ate payments were transferred, the container train departed. On Jan. 31, the train reached Dostyk, the last station in Kazakhstan.

The protocol on setting competitive preferential tariffs for cargo traffic was signed between Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan on Jan. 14. The next day, the train departed from the Ukrainian port and reached its final destination in China on Feb. 2. It is planned to start a full-scale exploitation of the transport route in March 2016.

"We will probably meet in Baku by the end of February to sign the final protocol to coordinate all technical problems and minor uncertainties, so that I expect the start of regular transportation already in March this year," said Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine Andrey Pivovarsky.

The national carrier Kazakhstan Temir Zholy participates in the transport project in compliance with the existing rules of Kazakh legislation. The Trans-Caspian international transport route runs through China, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and then goes to Europe.

Kazakh Goal Is to Continue Assisting Africa

By Aiman Turebekova

Kazakhstan's continued institutional development assistance to African countries was greatly appreciated during the 26th African Union (AU) heads of state and government assembly, the country's foreign ministry said in a Feb. 1 press release. A Kazakh delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Yerzhan Ashikbayev participated with observer status.

As AU's supreme organ, the assembly regulates policies, forms priorities, ratifies the annual programme and monitors the policy and decision administration. The assembly was held Jan. 29-31 in the Ethiopian capital under the theme "African year of human rights with particular focus on the rights of women."

The summit was dedicated to the issues of sustainable development in Africa in terms of realising of the Agenda 2063 goals. The participants discussed topics of economic and investment cooperation, regional security provisions and promoting the human rights and migration policy.

Working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Kazakh side organised a special event dedicated to strengthening South-South cooperation for implementing sustain-

able development goals (SDGs) in Africa. African foreign ministries and heads of international organisations participated in the seminar.

In his speech, Ashikbayev told the guests about recent achievements in Kazakhstan and its contribution to achieving the SDGs and South-South global cooperation programme. He referred to the similarities between Kazakhstan's 2050 Strategy and AU's Agenda 2063 in terms of SDG implementation.

The participants also learned about a \$2 million Kazakh-UNDP cost-sharing project "Assistance to ministries of foreign affairs in Africa in terms of development of their potentials," aimed at institu-



Deputy Foreign Minister Yerzhan Ashikbayev meets with AU Commission Chairperson Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in Addis Ababa.

tional development assistance to African countries. Kazakhstan already boasts a strong track record in promoting South-South knowledge exchange and offering expertise in coal, oil and gas mining, as well as sustainable transport management, urban sanitation, arid land irrigation and growing wheat.

Ethiopian Foreign Minister Tedros Ghebreyesus noted the importance of Kazakh technical assistance rendered to African countries, including UNDP projects. He stressed the necessity to further advance and strengthen relations among the developing countries in the bloc.

UNDP African Regional Office Director Lebogang Motlana and several AU Secretariat directors highlighted the timeliness and relevance of the Kazakh projects aimed at ensuring Africa's well-being. UNDP Special Adviser on Africa Maged Abdel Aziz emphasised the continent's growing role in the modern world, which opens new prospects for cooperation, and suggested taking advantage of the opportunities.

The Kazakh delegation also used the event to highlight the relevance of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiatives at the UN General Assembly's 70th session in New York, as well as the nation's bid to secure a seat on the UN Security Council for 2017-2018. Preparations for the EXPO2017 international specialised exhibition were also discussed.

Attention was also drawn to Kazakhstan's proposal to create the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, which represents the nation's contribution to prevent hunger and food security problems in Africa. The programme is based on the country's firm position on the need to provide sustainable development, with food security as one of the main conditions.

On the margins of the summit, Ashikbayev met with AU Commission Chairperson Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and the

foreign ministers of Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoro Islands, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, the Republic of Seychelles, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Swaziland. The parties discussed further cooperation and ensuring mutual support for many important initiatives on international forum platforms.

During the meeting with Dlamini-Zuma, Ashikbayev stressed the union's important role in the all-round development of the continent and achievements in overcoming poverty and increasing people's welfare, preventing conflicts and providing for regional security. She noted she appreciated the country's participation in the summit and expressed confidence that mutually-beneficial relations between Kazakhstan and the AU will continue to grow.

Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov extended written invitations to the African foreign ministers with proposals to activate bilateral and multilateral contacts. Ashikbayev also presented his counter parts invitations on behalf of the Kazakh President and Prime Minister to attend EXPO2017 and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) food security general assembly meeting in April.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Nazarbayev Signs Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Ratification into Law

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev has passed the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) ratification agreement into law, the Akorda press office reported Jan. 27.

According to the agreement signed June 29, 2015 in Beijing where the bank's headquarters are, Kazakhstan's initial contribution to AIIB capital amounts to \$729.3 million (0.7 percent).

According to this index, the country will rank 17th among the 37 regional founders of the bank, Kazakhstan's news sources have reported.

The paid capital will amount to \$145.9 million and will be paid annually by five instalments, according to Kapital.kz.

According to Zakon.kz, the allocation of funds necessary to pay for annual membership fees was approved Aug. 8 at the session of the National Budget Commission on forming the national budget for 2016-2018.

The ratification will enable Kazakhstan to attract long-term credit resources for implementing infrastructure projects, Zakon.kz writes. Kazakhstan's involvement in the bank is expected to allow the implementation of projects under the Nurlu Zhol programme.

According to Sputniknews.com, the infrastructure bank's \$100 billion initial capital is divided into a million shares available only to AIIB members, with a nominal value of \$100,000 each.

Out of 57 countries, 37 are Asian

nations and 20 are non-regional countries. China, Russia and India are the bank's largest shareholders.

AIIB, which has 57 founding members, officially started operations on Jan. 16.

According to news sources, AIIB's President Jin Liqun said the bank would begin approving its first loans before the end of 2016.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is presenting itself as a modern, knowledge-based institution that will focus on the devel-

opment of infrastructure and other productive sectors in Asia, including energy and power, transportation and telecommunications, rural infrastructure and agriculture development, water supply and sanitation, environmental protection, urban development and logistics.

AIIB welcomes all regional and non-regional countries, developing and developed countries that seek to contribute to Asian infrastructure development and regional connectivity.

ECONOMY NEWS IN BRIEF

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the law "On ratification of the Loan Agreement (Project on Stimulation of Productive Innovations) between Kazakhstan and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development," the press service of the Akorda reported. The agreement will contribute to the implementation of a national qualification system, which is used in many developed countries. The system has eight qualification levels depending on education level. The cost of the project is \$137 million, \$100 million of which will be provided by the World Bank, as the lender is more commonly known. The project's completion date is June 30, 2020.

Minister of Finance of Kazakhstan Bakhyt Sultanov stated that \$20 billion has leaked from Kazakhstan in the last nine years at a government meeting in Astana Feb. 2, Kapital.kz reports. He highlighted that the state has some reserves for legalisation of funds placed abroad. The minister emphasised that legalising income does not mean the money will automatically return to Kazakhstan, because often, the money will have already been invested in projects abroad. He added that Kazakhstan needs additional conditions and tools for eligible investing. Sultanov said that money should earn money and big finances are in big projects, noting that today Kazakhstan possesses a real, attractive instrument for investing: the country's top 65 state companies are being privatised.

Chairman of the National Bank of Kazakhstan Daniyar Akishev said that 43 billion tenge (US\$114.7 million) has been invested in Kazakhstan's economy through the country's ongoing legalisation campaign at a government meeting Feb. 2, Zakon.kz reports. He noted that the campaign started on Sept. 1, 2014, and as of Jan. 26, banks had opened 219 accounts in the amount of 135 billion tenge (\$360 million). More than 90 percent of the amount was in accounts opened in Almaty city. Financial instruments in the amount of 43 billion tenge (\$114.7 million) have been purchased and 3.1 billion tenge (\$8.3 million) has been paid into the budget. The remaining total amount in the accounts reaches nearly 40 billion tenge (\$106.7 million). According to Akishev, banks additionally registered 50 billion tenge (\$133.3 million) from December 2015 to January 2016 due to simplified legalisation procedures and the partial abolition of the requirement to keep money for a period of five years and pay a 10 percent duty.

Minister of Agriculture of Kazakhstan Assylzhan Mamytbekov met with Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry of Italy Maurizio Martina Jan. 28, the press service of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan informs. The parties signed a statement on strengthening cooperation in agriculture.

Akim (Governor) of Mangystau region Alik Aidarbayev said that the region is implementing 14 infrastructure and industrial projects under the Nurlu Zhol programme, Kursiv reports. According to him, the implementation of projects will help Mangystau keep up the pace of its economic development. The total cost of the projects reaches 159 billion tenge (\$424 million), and nearly 4,000 new jobs will be created under the programme. In 2015, the region commissioned 11 industrial and infrastructure projects worth 50.5 billion tenge (\$134.7 million) and created 655 new jobs. Among successful projects, the akim named the Azer-Sun Sofie Med Group, the Food Logistics Centre and the Aktau Northern Sea Terminal. As of today, the new Kuryk ferry-boat complex is under construction.

National Bank of Kazakhstan Chairman Speaks on Current Issues, Activities

By Georg R. Vassilenko

ASTANA – National Bank of Kazakhstan Chairman Daniyar Akishev held a press conference Jan. 21 dedicated to the results of 2015, current issues of monetary policy and the bank's activities.

"In 2015, the annual inflation was 13.6 percent," he said. "Since last year food prices rose by 10.9 percent and prices for non-food products by 22.6 percent, while prices for paid services rose by 8.1 percent," he said.

The chairman expanded on the exchange rate policy.

"This morning at today's session of the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange, the rate was 383.23 tenge per dollar, with the trade volume

of \$58 million. Since the previous press conference those risks which we talked about became a reality: the oil prices went below \$30 per barrel (from the beginning of the year oil prices fell by 26 percent) and the weakening of the Russian ruble by more than 10 percent. At the present time, we are witnessing the formation of a course at a new level," said Akishev.

He also talked about the reserves.

"At the end of 2015, gross international reserves of the National Bank amounted to \$28.1 billion, while the international reserves of the country, including the National Fund assets, stood at \$91.6 billion. For example, in late 2007 before

the global financial crisis, the total reserves of the country were \$38.6 billion. We believe that the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves of the National Fund and the National Bank have reached 50 percent of the country's GDP, which allow having the necessary safety margin to ensure the preservation and stability of the financial system in the country under any scenario with oil prices," he said.

The chairman also addressed the balance of payments.

"Previously, we published preliminary figures for the first nine months of 2015. Now we have given information on the final assessment of the balance of payments for nine months. No significant differences between the

preliminary assessment and final data were observed. The volume of bank lending to the economy increased over the year by 4.7 percent," he said.

Akishev also talked about deposits.

"During 2015 the volume of deposits in banks increased by 36.6 percent, mainly due to the re-evaluation of foreign currency deposits. As a result, the level of dollarisation of deposits has reached 69 percent, including accounts of individuals at 78.9 percent," he said.

The chairman spoke on individual deposit rates.

"The Kazakhstan Deposit Insurance Fund decided to establish the maximum amount of interest rates on deposits of individuals in na-

tional currency from 10 percent to 14 percent on deposits in foreign currency. The rate was reduced from 3 to 2 percent since Feb. 1," he said.

Akishev concluded his comments with remarks about the money market.

"On Dec. 24, the National Bank increased the volume of transactions on the money market. The National Bank's share of the money market has reached 47 percent. In the banks' balance sheets, liabilities to the National Bank are 8 percent and in individual banks it is 20 percent. That is, the funds of the National Bank are beginning to play a significant role in funding and providing liquidity of banks," he said.

President Sets Course toward Oil & Gas Independence, Urges Wealthy to Return Money to Country

By Talgat Issenov

ASTANA – President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev discussed the government goal of making Kazakhstan independent of oil and gas imports by 2018, urged the entire business community to take part in the country's current privatisation process and spoke about the need to economise during the 17th congress of the Nur Otan Party Jan. 29.

"In two years, Kazakhstan should be 100 percent provided with domestic petroleum products and gas. I set the task to completely meet our market demand by 2018 with domestic oil products such as petrol, diesel oil, aviation kerosene and gas," Nazarbayev said in his speech at the congress.

"We expect that commercial extraction in Kashagan will start

up. It is necessary to complete the expansion of the Caspian pipeline consortium; expansion provides us with additional volumes," the President stressed. "The Beineu-Bozoi-Shymkent gas pipeline is nearing completion. We now do not ask anyone for gas: the entire south is provided with gas from Kazakhstan. Oil production volume in the country will reach 92 million tonnes per year in 2021."

Nazarbayev urged Kazakhstan's people to get used to living with low oil price conditions earlier in his speech.

Nazarbayev also urged Forbes-listed Kazakh billionaires as well as millionaires to return and invest money in the homeland.

"We have grown many wealthy people. ... But it's our country – Kazakhstan – that allowed you to earn all of this money. So let's invest here ... Kazakhstan has con-

cluded agreements on legal assistance literally with all countries," he commented implying that no one can feel immune or safe from prosecution for siphoning off money out of the country or avoiding taxes.

The President also again reminded the population to participate in property legalisation processes.

"Initial privatisation, initial accumulating of funds have never been absolutely transparent. ... It was this way throughout the world. Therefore, we forgive. ... We have even changed the legislation; [we] do not even take taxes now," Nazarbayev urged, meaning that no taxes are levied on the monies returned to the country. "If you have a house abroad, get it legalised so that we know about it. So that law enforcement bodies will not be looking for you later ..."

The President also addressed the

principles of austerity and the need to economise.

"Samruk Kazyna saved 53 billion tenge [about US\$143 million]. [Director of EXPO 2017] Akhmetzhan Yessimov reported to me that 155 billion tenge [about US\$418.4 million] at EXPO 2017 was saved and returned to the government, despite the fact that there used to be disgraceful behaviour [there]. ... The preparation process of the exhibition is going normally," he said.

Kazakhstan's current large-scale privatisation is an important part of its anti-crisis programme, the President said.

"The entire system of public expenditures will be built on the principles of austerity. This is not such a complicated matter, we are simply reducing surpluses," said Nazarbayev.

In his speech, the President

touched once again on agriculture, calling the agricultural sector one of the key drivers of economic growth.

"Introducing new technologies into production infrastructure should lead to growth in agriculture by 1.5 times. We also need to develop science and innovation," he said. "As was recently mentioned at the [World] Economic Forum in Davos, the world stands on the threshold of the fourth industrial revolution. Stunning discoveries await the planet."

According to Nazarbayev, construction of the Western Europe-Western China motorway is coming to an end in Kazakhstan this year. He noted that two more promising destinations for road construction are Eurasian transcontinental and trans-Caspian routes.

EBRD Advises Kazakhstan to Focus on Preparing for Better Times

Continued from Page A1

The key is to ensure better positioning at the time when improvements in external factors materialise, noted his report.

"Perhaps one of those factors will be implemented in the coming three or four years. Kazakhstan needs to get ready in order not to miss this moment and to take advantage of the benefits that one or the other situation will bring," said Preimanis, according to Forbes Kazakhstan. "To do that, the country needs continued focus on structural reforms, improvement in infrastructure and innovation development in high-tech and low-tech sectors. These will help the country to regain its positions."

Kazakhstan showed significant progress with reforms such as the new investment law, new exchange rate regime, public-private partner-

ship legislation, tariff reform in regulated sectors, transformation of the Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund and the first steps in establishing the Astana International Financial Centre, according to his report.

Now is the time to press forward, however, because the difficult external environment should not deter reforms, he added.

"Kazakhstan companies are lagging innovation leaders... in the short run, all efforts should go into effective implementation of the President's reforms under five areas, 100 Concrete Steps, Nurlu Zhol programme and other reforms," the report said.

"Innovation will help to revitalise Kazakhstan's economy and more innovation is needed as favourable external factors can come in sight at any time and when they do, the economy should be more competitive," noted the report.

Preimanis announced several projections on the country's economy as part of his presentation. The country's growth outlook has been affected. As a result of the plunge in oil prices, recession in Russia and depreciation of the rouble, Kazakhstan's gross domestic product (GDP) growth decreased to 1.2 percent in 2015 compared to 4.3 percent in 2014.

Considering oil prices will fluctuate between \$30-40 per barrel, growth is projected to remain subdued in 2016, reaching only 1.5 percent, while inflation is projected to be 10 percent, indicated the report.

"Given heightened anxiety in the country, realisation of global/regional risks can result in a very different growth outcome in 2016," it added. Preimanis is certain the impact of negative external factors on Kazakhstan's econo-

my comes amid anxiety inside the community.

With the efforts of the country's National Bank, inflation can be expected to return to the 6-8 percent corridor after 2016 and even lower levels in the longer term, he said.

According to EBRD Country Director for Kazakhstan Janet Heckman, the bank more than doubled its activity in the nation.

"2014 was a record year, but 2015 broke those records and was an excellent year for EBRD in the country," she noted during the presentation.

The bank financed more than 30 projects across all sectors of the economy, including small and medium businesses, energy efficiency, climate change mitigation, municipal and regional infrastructure and agribusiness.

"Our investment was more than a billion dollars last year... To-

gether with your government, we invested in changing the lives in some 10 cities across Kazakhstan through safer water, better waste water services and modern, accessible and clean public transport," Heckman said.

"Particularly exciting was the Kazakhstan launch of our Women in Business programme in November (2015), which provides women-led companies with funding through local banks and also advisory services. This programme was the first of its kind in Central Asia; at least around 2,000 Kazakh small and medium enterprises are expected to benefit from it," said Heckman.

In general, EBRD's small business support programme concluded 203 consulting projects for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), with funding coming primarily from the government.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

Hong Kong Airlines has signed a codeshare agreement with Air Astana, the Aviation Tribune reports. Hong Kong Airlines customers can now travel with Air Astana to Almaty, Kazakhstan, while Air Astana customers can book tickets with both airlines to reach Hong Kong Airlines' destinations in China, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam under the agreement. Air Astana operates services to Hong Kong twice a week using a Boeing 757. The flight time from Hong Kong to Almaty is 7 hours 15 minutes. The service was launched in August 2012; since then, Air Astana has carried approximately 74,000 passengers and nearly 1,300 tonnes of cargo. Hong Kong SAR passport holders can travel without visas to Kazakhstan, as can citizens of Kazakhstan visiting Hong Kong.

Air Astana, Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines signed a codeshare agreement for flights between Astana and Paris on Feb. 2, the Aviation Tribune reports. The flights will be operated by Air Astana from March 11. The agreement allows passengers from across Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines' worldwide networks to buy tickets and travel to and from Astana. Air Astana operates between Astana and Paris on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, using Boeing B757-200 aircraft. President and CEO of Air Astana Peter Foster said that the agreement adds Astana to the KLM and Air France network, making it easier for global travellers to fly with Air Astana to and from the Kazakh airline's home base using the Paris hub.

Daniyar Berlibayev has been elected chairman of KazTransOil, the press service of the company reports. The KazTransOil public-private company held an extraordinary meeting of shareholders Jan. 29, during which serving members of the Board of Directors were terminated and new members were approved. According to the resolution of the extraordinary meeting of shareholders, Daniyar Berlibayev, Ardak Mukushov, Nurtas Shmanov, Luis Coimbra, Serik Primbetov and Fernando Machinena were elected to the Board of Directors of the company.

Kazkommertsbank has completed the sale of 608,374,602,366 ordinary shares of BTA Bank, representing 99.4187 percent of the total number of common shares of BTA Bank. The shares were purchased by Kazkommertsbank shareholders Kenes Rakishev and Nurzhan Sukhanberdin, who each took 299,211,380,223 shares, or 49.18 percent of BTA shares sold. After the sale of BTA shares, KKB ceased to be a shareholder of BTA. The common shares of BTA were sold according to a proposal made to KKB shareholders for 0.00001 tenge per ordinary share.

A Moody's report rating 32 integrated oil, exploration and production, and oilfield services companies in Europe, the Middle East and Africa rated Kazakhstan's KazTransOil Baa3. According to the report, KazTransOil's rating reflects strong operating activities and creditworthiness. Moody's analysts consider that the high level of support from the Kazakh government reflects KazTransOil's strategically essential role and the importance of energy exports to Kazakhstan's economic growth. Moody's characterised KazTransOil as a company with a strong market position, a lack of debt, a diversified customer base and satisfied indicators of liquidity. The report indicates that cash flow generation at KazTransOil in 2016 will comfortably cover its maintenance and dividend payouts in the amount of 40 percent of net profit.

Hungarian investors plan to build three solar power plants in the South Kazakhstan region, Kazinform reports. This project was discussed at a meeting held at the regional administration between Deputy Governor of South Kazakhstan Saparbek Tuyakbayev and representatives of the South Kaz Solar Consortium. The parties discussed prospects for building three solar power plants in Shymkent, Kentau and Turkestan. The total capacity of the solar plants is expected to reach 170 megawatts.

Carrefour to Enter Kazakh Market during Q1



By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – Carrefour, the French chain of supermarkets, plans to enter the Kazakh market early this year, Kazpravda.kz reported Jan. 22 with reference to the Almaty akimat (city administration) press service.

"Active work to attract major global brands is underway... A chain of Starbucks coffee houses was opened in Almaty in December of 2015," said the akimat, according to the newspaper. "Carrefour retailer, the second largest after the American Walmart stores based on market capitalisation, plans to open its first store in Almaty during the first quarter of 2016."

The store will be in the new Grand Park Almaty, a shopping centre at the intersection of Kabdolov and Altynsarin streets, wrote Forbes Kazakhstan. It is expected to be 12,500 square metres large.

The store will be in the new Grand Park Almaty, a shopping centre at the intersection of Kabdolov and Altynsarin streets, wrote Forbes Kazakhstan. It is expected to be 12,500 square metres large.

Carrefour isn't the only multinational retailer with its eye on the Kazakh market. Leroy Merlin, France's largest home improvement chain, intends to open sites in Almaty and the Almaty region by the end of the year. Negotiations are currently underway with companies such as Auchan, Bombardier and IKEA, wrote Kazpravda.kz. It was also reported in January that Walmart is interested.

As part of the comprehensive plan to attract investment, Almaty Akim (Mayor) Bauyrzhan Baibek signed an order Jan. 22 creating the eponymous council, according to the newspaper. The body consists of major Kazakh and foreign investors, international consulting

companies, financial organisations and others.

The council's main tasks are to develop recommendations and suggestions on improving Almaty's investment climate, devise strategies to attract foreign investment to the city's economy and implement investment projects, reported Kazpravda.kz. The council will also strengthen the dialogue platform between the state and investors.

Founded in 1963, Carrefour owns hypermarkets, supermarkets, discounters, convenience and wholesale stores around the world. MAF Hypermarkets Kazakhstan, a subdivision of Arab Majid Al Futtaim, is the owner of the franchise responsible for opening the stores, reported Forbes Kazakhstan. The company plans to open 15 more outlets throughout the country within the next five years.

"The market in our country is fairly narrow; not so many strong and stable participants are there.

Kazkommertsbank, BTA Bank Merger Named 2015's Best M&A Deal in CIS

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – The merger of Kazakhstan's large banks Kazkommertsbank (Kazkom) and BTA Bank was assessed as "the best M&A (merger and acquisition) deal of 2015 in the Commonwealth of Independent States," by the Kazakh-British Chamber of Commerce, according to a Forbes.kz report dated Jan. 26.

According to Kazakh-British Chamber of Commerce experts, the deal was the largest in the M&A market in the financial history of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the first time in the former Soviet Union that two major financial institutions of comparable size had merged. The

new financial institution is operating under the brand name and on the technology platform of Kazkom.

"After the integration was completed, we have assumed an important social role of fulfilling obligations to depositors of the troubled bank as well as improving banking assets. At this stage, we are working with international consultants on a new business strategy, which aims to ensure further effective business development and growth of the bank's profits. We have an ambitious goal, which is to make Kazkom a national champion in the banking market, and today we have all the resources necessary to achieve our goal," said CEO of the new institution Magzhan Auezov in a

Air Astana Reveals New Routes, Cost Mitigation Measures

By Julia Rutz

Air Astana presented its 2015 corporate social responsibility report Jan. 27 in Astana. The document focused mainly on environmental and safety issues, economic contributions, services and community-based initiatives, as well as labour relations.

Air Astana President Peter Foster also highlighted the results of the past year and shared the airline's plans for 2016.

"During 2015, the company achieved a profit of \$47.7 million, which is 144 percent greater than in 2014. The number of passengers we transported increased by 2 percent in comparison to the past year and totalled 3.86 million people. At the same time, the company's sales turnover decreased by 21 percent and made \$738.1 million. This appeared as a consequence of the current difficult market conditions," he said.

Air Astana was able to compensate for the declining profitability with significantly-reduced costs for aviation kerosene. At the same time, the reduction of flight prices was not foreseen, except for short-term offerings.

Foster added the airline plans to open new flights this year to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia and Tehran, Iran.



Peter Foster

During the event, national carrier representatives talked about the company's activities in the social sphere.

year, 11 children were transported for treatment abroad at the expense of the company. The company also plans to enlarge its participation in charity projects," said Foster.

The aim of the report was to present the main aspects of the company's activity and strategic plans, as well as raise public awareness and improve the efficiency of interaction between Air Astana and its partners.

The airline contributes to improving the ecological situation in Kazakhstan by reducing harmful emissions into the atmosphere, which is achieved by fleet renew-

FOSTER: "During 2015, the company achieved a profit of \$47.7 million, which is 144 percent greater than in 2014. The number of passengers we transported increased by 2 percent in comparison to the past year and totalled 3.86 million people."

"We are very proud that we are in a position which allows us to continue our participation in charitable projects in Kazakhstan. We will continue supporting the Great Patriotic War veterans, as well as children who need medical care abroad. In 2015, we supported the carriage of 130 children. During the first three weeks of the current

al, route optimisation and waste recycling. In addition, Air Astana adheres to strict safety standards by improving the level of safety and services both on the ground and on board. The company provides jobs for more than 4,600 employees and invests heavily in the training of pilots and flight attendants.

Samruk Kazyna Expects \$25 per Barrel of Oil, 400 Tenge per Dollar Exchange Rate

By Georg R. Vassilenko

ASTANA – The best-case scenario of the Samruk Kazyna National Welfare Fund is the cost of oil at \$35 per barrel and an exchange rate in the range of 380 tenge per dollar, said managing director for financial operations Elena Bakhmutova.

Samruk Kazyna, which manages assets worth about \$50 billion, is expecting some oil price and tenge weakening in 2016 and calculating the basic state for the companies it manages at \$25 per barrel and 400 tenge per dollar. Bakhmutova shared her assessments in an interview with Reuters.

"The optimistic scenario for the development of a group of the fund's companies should be considered at \$35 per barrel and for the stability of the exchange rate in the range of 380 tenge per dollar. As a baseline scenario, [we calculate at] \$25 per barrel and 400 tenge per dollar and the stress scenario [is calculated at] \$20 per barrel and 420 tenge per dollar," she said.



Elena Bakhmutova

She indicated all investment programmes have been reduced and are focusing on protecting jobs, keeping their companies afloat and servicing debt.

Samruk Kazyna manages assets worth about \$50 billion.

"The investment programme of the group of the fund's companies, which was calculated at an oil price of \$40 per barrel and 300 tenge per dollar, amounted to 1.206 trillion tenge (US\$3.2 billion). Of these loans, about 573 billion tenge

(US\$1.5 billion) were accounted for, but we will do an audit of projects," said Bakhmutova.

She noted this year will be more difficult than 2015.

"It's in the country, including for a group of fund companies. This is not a surprise," she said.

Bakhmutova added she sees no risk in terms of debt servicing.

"In general, over the next three years out of the total external debt 23 per cent are to be repaid, of which 40 percent is expedient to refinance," she said.

According to Reuters, the total external debt of the Samruk

Kazyna group of companies has decreased in the past year by \$7 billion to \$17.3 billion. A total of 59 percent of the debt falls on KazMunayGas (KMG), which suffered the most from the fall in oil prices.

the entire banking network. Kazkommertsbank and BTA officially announced the deconsolidation on June 30, 2015.

For now, Kazkom is one of the largest banks in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, with subsidiaries in investment portfolio management, insurance and brokerage. The bank has subsidiaries in other CIS countries, including Russia and Tajikistan.

The Kazakh-British Chamber of Commerce is a bilateral business association that aims to strengthen and develop economic relations between the business structures of Kazakhstan and the U.K. It was founded with support from Kazakhstan's embassy in London and the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Kazakhstan.

Kazkom press statement on the bank's website.

The merger was extremely complex due to the large size of both banks, as well as legal and technical issues. The process was completed in a surprisingly short period of time, just over a year and a half, without any technical failures, according to Kazkom's website.

This integration has resulted in the significant increase of the customer base of the combined bank, which has grown to up to 6 million. Bank customers have access to the most extensive banking infrastructure in the country: about 25 percent of all ATMs across the country, 300 offices and 40 percent of all point-of-sale terminals and approximately the same market share of card payments.

In February 2014, the consortium of investors represented by Kazkom and Kenes Rakishev, former chairman of BTA Bank's Board of Directors, agreed to acquire BTA Bank from the Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund. In June, the deal on the acquisition of BTA shares was made. (Rakishev, as a general partner of the public-private parent company of Kazkom, Alnair Capital Holding, is now a major shareholder in the new bank.)

The National Bank approved the assets exchange scheme in May 2015. Upon completion of the asset exchange in June, BTA returned its banking license to the regulator. On June 29, 2015, the provision of integrated services to the clients of both banks was initiated along

EDITORIAL & OPINION

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Kazakh Privatisation Will Help Cushion the Impact of Current Economic Slowdown

The current economic turmoil, which we see played out daily on our TVs and in newspapers and stock markets across the world, is setting new challenges for every country. In an interconnected global economy, no one is immune.

World leaders must decide how best to lead their countries through the turbulence: adopt a business as usual approach and hope the damage isn't too severe, or confront the challenges head on. Kazakhstan, it seems, has chosen the second, more difficult option.

Fundamental to the economic course chosen is a remarkable new wave of privatisation. This is meant to help the country through these current global difficulties while also positioning Kazakhstan to achieve its long-term goals of becoming a top 30 world economy and a prosperous and healthy society.

The privatisation programme was unveiled last November when the Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund announced it was to sell stakes in 60 large state-owned enterprises. It includes plans over the next four years to cut state ownership in major companies including KazMunayGas, Kazatomprom and Samruk-Energo from 60-70 percent to 15 percent. Privatisations will be carried out through a combination of sales of strategic stakes and stock market listings, which will all be handled by Kazakhstan's new Astana International Financial Centre.

Kazakhstan's privatisation drive will achieve three important goals. First, it will raise revenue to help cushion the impact of the economic slowdown on Kazakhstan and its citizens. The additional resources will, in the short-term, help the government continue investing in essential services and infrastructure improvements.

Second, in the longer-term, privatisation will streamline Samruk Kazyna's operations and increase the sovereign wealth fund's efficiency. And third, the injection of outside capital and expertise and the

reduction of state involvement will provide a further spur to Kazakhstan's economy by boosting competition and productivity.

It may take longer to notice these benefits, but if the privatisation plan is properly structured and implemented, they will be wide-ranging. Evidence across many countries shows that privatisation increases efficiency and profitability while improving services and cutting costs for consumers.

Take two examples from the telecommunications sector in Latin America. Chile's telephone company doubled its capacity four years after being sold, while Mexico's privatised telephone company significantly reduced its per-unit labour costs.

These short and long-term benefits are why the International Monetary Fund has already commended Kazakhstan's plans as a significant step in reducing the role of the state in its economy. Samruk Kazyna itself is optimistic that the drive will improve the structure of its assets, increase the level of corporate governance while eliminating corrupt activity, encourage the development of small and medium-sized businesses and support the development of Kazakhstan's stock market.

There have, of course, been some sceptical voices about the privatisation plans, with suggestions that the government may be reluctant to relinquish control over major economic assets. They point to the fact that only in 2008, Samruk Kazyna took stakes in a number of privatised assets.

Given the global financial crisis at the time and fears of a world-wide recession, these emergency measures were an economically sound decision. Today we confront not just more global turbulence but a low oil price environment, which may stretch into the future. This is why privatisation is seen as a critical and essential step to securing Kazakhstan's future prosperity for not just the next few years but decades to come.

Global Ban on All Nuclear Armed Cruise Missiles Needed, Top Disarmament Expert Says

By Tatiana Braun

ASTANA – Andy Weber, who stepped down last summer as U.S. State Department Deputy Coordinator for Ebola Response, has more than 30 years under his belt of working to counter some of the most dangerous threats to mankind posed by weapons of mass destruction. Some of his most famous exploits included working at the heart of Project Sapphire, a top secret joint Kazakh-American operation in 1994 to remove almost 600 kilograms of highly enriched uranium, enough to produce two dozen nuclear bombs, from eastern Kazakhstan to the United States where it was down-blended and used as fuel for power stations.

In an exclusive interview with this newspaper, Weber shared his views on the most pressing threats the mankind faces today and the lessons that can be drawn from cooperation between the United States and Kazakhstan under the famed Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Programme.

In Kazakhstan, you are known as a prominent American expert in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. You have more than 30 years of experience in this field. What would you advise the world today?

First, we need to redouble our efforts to realise the shared vision of Presidents Barack Obama and Nursultan Nazarbayev of a world without nuclear weapons. Together we have accomplished so much to make the world safer from weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. Second, we need to work together and with global partners to prevent and prepare for the potential that terrorists will develop and use biological, chemical or even nuclear weapons.

What is the hierarchy of threats?

The greatest danger is that nuclear weapons will be used. We have avoided this for seventy years, but I am concerned that the possibility is trending in the wrong direction. This is why former Secretary of Defence William J. Perry and I have proposed a global ban on all nuclear armed cruise missiles. These are among the most dangerous and destabilising class of nuclear weapons. They can be launched without warning from the air, land or sea, and it is impossible to know if one flying towards your country is nuclear or conventional. After this, I am extremely concerned about WMD terrorism using biological weapons.

In this regard, how do you assess President Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiatives that he voiced at the jubilee session of the UN General Assembly?

I applaud President Nazarbayev's leadership and moral authority, and strongly support making a nuclear weapons free world the "main goal of humanity in the 21st Century." It will be hard, but together we can and must do it.

In the early 1990s, you worked at the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan. Which significant events, facts or meetings of those years do you recall?

Living and working in Almaty for two years after Kazakhstan's independence was the most rewarding and exciting time in my life. I have so many wonderful personal and professional memories, but most of all it is the incredible



Andy Weber

Kazakh partners I remember. The hospitality, warmth and commitment to building a great future in a time of uncertainty inspired me every day.

Now, on to the most interesting things. During the last two decades, you took part in all major disarmament projects of Kazakhstan under the Nunn-Lugar programme, including the destruction of silo launchers at the former Semipalatinsk polygon and plugging the tunnels at the Degelen massif there. What was the most difficult in your peace-keeping mission? How did you manage to break the military lobby?

I learned that the small bureaucrats can be the worst, but we always had access to the highest levels when needed to overcome obstacles. Since we shared the objective of making Kazakhstan and the world safer, and enjoyed personal trust developed over years of partnership on sensitive projects, in the end we always succeeded. That was the magic of the Nunn-Lugar Programme.

People in Kazakhstan remember you as one of the key characters in the implementation of Project Sapphire, a top secret Kazakh-American operation to transport 600 kg of highly enriched uranium (HEU) from the Ulba Metallurgical Plant (UMP) to the U.S. in 1994. In the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by David Hoffman "The Dead Hand," it was written that the then Director of UMP Vitaliy Mette contacted you in order to inform about the existence of almost unprotected HEU. Do you recall the chronicle of those days? Do you plan to write your own book?

Yes, I remember those events like a movie in my head. Enough weapons grade uranium metal to make dozens and dozens of nuclear weapons! What we did together to eliminate this threat was historic. People made it happen – Nursultan Nazarbayev, Vladimir Shkolnik, Vitaliy Mette, Sat Tokpabayev, Bolat Nurgaliev, Vladimir Bozhko and many others. A Hollywood producer recently asked me to help make a major movie about it, and yes, I may also write a book.

In Hoffman's book, there are chapters devoted to a no less terrible object – the anthrax factory in Stepnogorsk. Let me give the following paragraph: "In Building 221, Weber climbed to the top of one of the twenty-thousand-litre fermenters and looked down into it with a flashlight. The cylinder was made of specialty steel with a resin lining. He could see the impellers attached to a central rod that would stir the anthrax spores. He could not see the bottom in the dark, four floors below, but he got a full sense of the incredible volume, the trillions of spores of anthrax bacteria that would

be swirling inside the chamber, enough to wipe out entire populations." Were you scared?

I had received special vaccinations and wore protective gear, so I was not scared. The scale was chilling. The secret factory was built and certified to produce 300 tonnes of anthrax biological weapons during a mobilisation period of eight months. Evil is the only word to describe it.

There are also the following words in that book: "I had never bought into Reagan's "Evil Empire" thing. I was a product of liberal eastern schools, I went to Cornell, but there it was. I was face to face with evil." Evil called nuclear, chemical and biological threats that you confronted as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defence is to this day in front of all humanity. If the world sounds the alarm about the nuclear and chemical threats, the voice of the planet is not so alarming about the biological threat. In this light, I think the international community has not yet appreciated the "Stepnogorsk disarmament" to the extent it deserves it. What is your view?

I know of no other case in history where two countries worked in partnership to safely eliminate a massive biological weapons factory like Stepnogorsk. Profoundly, many of the same people who built it expertly carried out its safe destruction. Many opposed this project, but President Nazarbayev was steadfast in his desire to rid Kazakhstan of this blight on humanity. For this the world is in his debt.

Until your retirement, you held the post of Special Coordinator of the U.S. State Department on the fight against Ebola. It is interesting, "is the devil so black as he is painted?"

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa showed how vulnerable the world is to biological threats, both natural and intentional. The world was slow to react, but Barack Obama and Ban Ki-Moon mobilised over seventy countries, including Kazakhstan, to support the African response. Together we may have saved a million or more lives. Now we need to make sure every country has an effective system to prevent, detect and respond to epidemics. This is why over fifty countries and international organizations have joined the global health security agenda. And this is why the U.S. is supporting the construction of a world class centre for disease control in Almaty.

Following your retirement, last summer you came to Astana in order to take part in a seminar devoted to the lessons of cooperation between Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and the U.S. Could you share your impression of a new meeting with Kazakhstan, with our capital?

Visiting beloved Kazakhstan I am amazed by what you have accomplished in just twenty five years. Most of your neighbours have not done as well. It shows how much difference wise leadership and hard working, talented people can make.

This year our country will celebrate the 25th anniversary of independence. What would you like to say to the people of Kazakhstan?

From my heart I am so proud to salute the people of Kazakhstan and congratulate you on your resilience and incredible success. Rakmet and good luck Kazakhstan!



THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN IS SEEKING A SEAT ON THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL AS A NON-PERMANENT MEMBER FOR 2017-2018. OUR PRIORITIES WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS REFLECT FOUR PRIMARY ISSUES FACING THE WORLD TODAY: FOOD SECURITY, WATER SECURITY, ENERGY SECURITY AND NUCLEAR SECURITY.

IN THE 24 YEARS SINCE OUR INDEPENDENCE, KAZAKHSTAN HAS WORKED TIRELESSLY TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES IN OUR OWN COUNTRY AND BEYOND. AMONG MANY OTHER INITIATIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS, KAZAKHSTAN IS CURRENTLY:

ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST GRAIN PRODUCERS AND WHEAT EXPORTERS. WE HAVE DISTRIBUTED WHEAT AND FOOD TO NATIONS IN NEED.

A CONSTRUCTIVE INNOVATOR IN WATER SECURITY COOPERATION AND TECHNOLOGIES. WE HAVE MADE GREAT STRIDES IN THE RESTORATION OF THE ARAL SEA.

AN ACTIVE SUPPORTER OF DEVELOPING A GREEN ECONOMY AND ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES THROUGH OUR GREEN BRIDGE INITIATIVE AND AS HOSTS OF EXPO 2017, THEME OF WHICH IS "FUTURE ENERGY".

A GLOBAL LEADER IN NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION, DISARMAMENT AND SECURITY, AN INITIATOR OF ADOPTING A UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE WORLD AND A SPONSOR OF THE ATOM PROJECT, A WORLDWIDE PETITION CAMPAIGN TO PERMANENTLY END NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING.

These issues are complex and interdependent. They require global cooperation and relationship building. Kazakhstan has come a long way in a short time because we know that cooperation is the key to success. We are dedicated to knowledge and resource sharing in order to help make the world a better, more secure place for its citizens.

The achievement and maintenance of international peace and global security are paramount to the success of the planet and its people. In Kazakhstan, we are ready to do our part to ensure that success as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

For more information and a video on Kazakhstan's initiatives, please visit mfa.gov.kz.



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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

More Work Ahead, Says Central Election Commission Chairman

By Lilia Syzdykova

Since President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the decree Jan. 20 to hold early election for the Mazhilis, Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission (CEC) has been actively preparing for the electoral process. CEC Chairman Kuandyk Turgankulov shared his views about the progress to date and plans for the near future in a following interview.



Kuandyk Turgankulov

Three weeks passed since the head of state signed the decree to hold the early election. Would you tell us about the work the CEC has undertaken so far?

During this period of time, we have done a really huge amount of work.

First, the commission meeting approved the priority regulations necessary for the organisation of the electoral process.

Moreover, we sent invitations to the heads of central election commissions of 18 foreign countries and adopted documents governing the activities of international observers.

Second, we held a national seminar on the organisation and holding of the elections. We discussed all the details of the upcoming elections in depth and provided all participants of the election process with thorough explanations on the election legislation.

Third, extensive work was initiated to inform the public about the upcoming elections. As part of this work, focus will be made on civic

engagement of the population to encourage voters to visit the polls on Election Day.

How many people will be able to exercise their right? What is the number of voters in the country?

In accordance with the law on elections, local executive bodies provide information about voters annually by Jan. 1 and July 1. Therefore, the voters' lists are already available at all the territorial election commissions and the CEC. According to the register, there are approximately 9,792,000 voters in our country.

Now the main task is to ensure the preparation of reliable voters' lists for each polling station, so that every citizen of our country can exercise his or her constitutional right.

In accordance with the approved time schedule, voters will be able to access the voters' lists presented to the election commissions by Feb. 28. At the same time, I would like to note that preparation of the electoral register is an ongoing

process. Updating the voters' lists will continue even on the day of voting.

Local executive bodies are responsible for the accuracy of the voters' lists and solving this problem involves all available resources.

However, an appeal was made to the people of Kazakhstan to demonstrate their civic engagement. On this occasion, we adopted and published a corresponding Appeal to Voters.

Starting March 4, voters can come to the polling station and verify their name on the voters' lists.

In light of the current economic situation, financing is one of the most widely-discussed issues. Could you tell us more about the pattern of expenditure for the elections?

In order to hold the elections of deputies of the Mazhilis and maslikhats (local representative bodies) at all levels, we will need 7 billion 985.3 million tenge (US\$22.2 million).

In the pattern of expenditure for the elections, 53 percent of these funds will be spent to pay salaries to members of the election commissions, whereas in accordance with the legislation, members of election commissions who are not public officials will not be paid. However, they receive additional payment for work on holidays and weekends.

Overall, remuneration for members of election commissions shall be effectuated in line with the Labour code according to

the timesheet for the actual time worked.

The second significant item of expenditure is the cost of the pre-election campaign of candidates for deputies of the maslikhats (17.4 percent).

The state legislation shall guarantee equal allocation of funds to candidates to come out with their programmes in the mass media. Each candidate shall be granted funds for a 15-minute speech on TV and 10-minute broadcast by radio, as well as for publication of two articles in the press in a vol-

There are three priority directions of our activity. The first is to work with the political parties. All political parties willing to take part in the election had to hold their pre-election congresses, approve their party lists and present them to us. However, there is a prerequisite: participation in the congress by representatives of regional branches from all oblasts, as well as from Astana and Almaty.

After that, we verify each person included on the list. This procedure is regulated by our Constitution and the election legislation.

political party and admit it to the pre-election campaign.

The second direction is the organisation of the activity of the election commissions. All local periodicals published the lists of members of the precinct election commissions. For some reason, there were vacant positions in some of the stations and together with the maslikhats we filled them in conformity with the law. The same work was carried out by the district and territorial election commissions.

In addition we announced electoral boundaries in all regions, so voters can be informed of the location of their polling station in advance.

The third direction is procedural guidelines. We hold cluster workshops in all regions for the members of our election commissions. Moreover, we will hold a workshop for the heads of the national media regarding election campaigns of deputies of the Mazhilis of the Parliament. In the course of this workshop, election campaigning on the Internet and social networks in accordance with the legislation will be considered separately. Training will also be conducted on campaigning for representatives of political parties participating in the elections.

In general, this is the cluster of issues we will focus on. In parallel, we are working with international organisations regarding electoral observation. Particular attention is paid to the publication of manuals for all participants of the electoral process and so on.

TURGANKULOV: "According to the register, there are approximately 9,792,000 voters in our country. ...

Starting March 4, voters can come to the polling station and verify their name on the voters' lists."

ume that does not exceed 0.1 of a printed sheet.

In total, 70 percent of the funds allocated for the elections will be spent only on these two items.

The remaining expenditures are related to printing ballots, making audio and video clips and their subsequent rotation on TV and radio, placement of billboards, various elements of outdoor advertising and others.

Preparations for the elections have started. Where will the CEC's work focus in the coming period?

I would like to remind everyone that in accordance with the Constitution, a deputy of the Mazhilis may be a person who has attained the age of 25 and has been a citizen of the country and a permanent resident for the last 10 years. Those people will be also subject to verification by tax and other state authorities.

On the whole, setting requirements for candidates and their subsequent verification is a generally recognised international practice used in all democratic countries.

After completing all these verifications, we register the list of a

Regional Economic Integration Is Key to Development Success in Central Asia and the Caucasus

By Dr. Shamshad Akhtar

As the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus celebrate the 25th anniversary of their independence, structural reform has become critical. The key to meeting many of the challenges, and seizing the opportunities of the changing global environment is closer regional economic integration with the rest of Asia and the Pacific.

Much has already been achieved in the post-independence era. Market institutions are generally well established, and socio-economic progress has been significant, but this is threatened in 2016 by economic contractions, driven by steep declines in oil, gas and commodity prices, as well as by ongoing currency depreciations.

The deep and complex reforms necessary to build economies capable of weathering these storms have yet to be completed. As a result, according to the latest analyses by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the economies of North and Central Asia, excluding the Russian Federation, saw GDP growth fall to 3 percent last year, down from 5.1 percent in 2014. This is expected to improve only slightly in 2016, to 3.4 percent.

Some countries, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have long-term diversification plans, but commodity dependence has increased during the last decade, driven by strong demand and high prices. The difference between commodity prices and their average production costs, for instance, has increased significantly and remained above 30 percent of GDP for the subregion over the past 25 years.

Job-generating growth, and wider prosperity in Central Asia and the Caucasus, therefore call for a renewed commitment to economic diversification, as well as accelerated regional economic cooperation and integration – specifically in priority areas such as cross-border infrastructure in transport, energy and ICT, as well as for additional policy reforms



to support market-driven trade and investment-led diversification and integration.

A valuable window of opportunity now exists for the subregion to revisit its development trajectory, and to effectively implement the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These opportunities are driven by a number of emerging dynamics.

Rebalancing and reviving growth and trade, with supportive diversification and structural transformation, will be particularly critical.

Enhanced political cooperation to address issues of peace and security, including to counter the threats of extremism and terrorism, as well as closer collaboration to eradicate extreme poverty, will facilitate further stabilisation.

Rebalancing and reviving growth and trade, with supportive diversification and structural transformation, will be particularly critical. North and Central Asia has the lowest share of intra-regional trade in Asia and the Pacific – just 6.6 percent. Stronger regional economic integration is therefore imperative to better link these economies to world markets and global value chains.

A number of key new subregional agreements and integration deals, in both transport and energy, lend greater hope for the deepening of regional connectivity and trade facilitation, which are together critical to revive trade growth in the short term.

Enhanced capitalisation of the

Multilateral Development Banks, as well as the recent establishment of China's Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, offer new vehicles and financing conduits for the infrastructure required for closer integration and sustainable development

New momentum has also been generated for subregional integration – both East and South – by recent regional initiatives such as China's 'Belt and Road', the Republic of Korea's 'Eurasia Initiative', as well as discussion on South Asia-Central Asia transport connectivity. All of these aim to advance connectivity of Central Asia and the Caucasus to the wider Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

To support countries in taking advantage of this window of opportunity, ESCAP will host an unprecedented dialogue for the

leaders of North and Central Asia on May 17 in Bangkok, as a focus of its annual Commission session.

By creating a platform for all leaders of the subregion to set a new vision and course for regional economic cooperation and integration, we aim to accelerate coherent structural reform and economic diversification, for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable subregion.

The author is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. She has been the UN's Sherpa for the G20 and previously served as Governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan and Vice President of the MENA Region of the World Bank. She will be meeting with heads of state and government, as well as senior ministers across Central Asia and the Caucasus in early February to obtain their guidance on the parameters and focal areas for the ESCAP deliberations in May.

FROM THE HEART OF EURASIA

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EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

New Kazakh Transit Route Links China to Iran

By Aiman Turebekova

A ceremony of sending of a demonstrational container train from China to Iran through Kazakhstan was held Feb. 1 in Yiwu city, the Province of Zhejiang in East China, reported the press office of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy National Company (KTZ).

Mayor of the town Sheng Qiuping, heads of China Railway Container Transport Group and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy Company as well as the international transport and logistics holding TransInvest Group and other officials took part in the event.

The new route, opened by the joint efforts of the railway companies of China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran, is the first logistics option in high-speed delivery of cargo from the coast of East China to markets of Iran.

The train is formed by 40-foot



containers with different types of cargo with 10 days transit time. Transportation by rail is much faster than by sea.

The new transport and logistics infrastructure of Kazakhstan is able to reduce significantly the length of the route and the time of

delivery of goods, which entails the growth of regional trade on the Eurasian continent.

Development of container transport on the international transport route contributes to its attraction capacity and competitiveness as well as the country's transit potential.

Elsewhere, questions on the export of Kazakh grain and conditions for Tajik passenger trains on the territory of Kazakhstan were raised in Astana on Jan. 27.

During the meeting, President of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy Company Askar Mamin and head of the State Unitary Enterprise Rohi Ohani Tojikiston Kamil Mirzoali discussed bilateral cooperation in the field of railway transport and logistics. After negotiations, the parties signed an agreement to supply a wide range of products of railway engineering to Tajikistan in 2016.

Under the agreement, the sides will cooperate in the supply of locomotives, turnouts and their repair kits and rolled wheels for freight and passenger trains.

The Tajik delegation was briefed on advanced technologies, long-term plans for further development of the Kazakh railway engineering.

Impact of Lifting of Sanctions on Iran Discussed in Astana



By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – The opportunities presented by the fact that sanctions on Iran are being lifted under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) were discussed at a special briefing at the Kazakh Foreign Ministry on Jan. 28.

Economic counsellors at the United States' embassy Patrick Horn and the Delegation of the European Union in Kazakhstan Niall Leonard took part in the briefing hosted by Deputy Foreign Minister Askar Mussinov. Representatives of other embassies, Kazakh ministries as well as entrepreneurs interested in the situation concerning Iran came to the meeting.

The main issue of the discussion was a list of the sanctions to be lifted. On Jan. 16, or "Implementation Day," legislation in the U.S. and the EU came into effect, relaxing significantly the sanctions in place against Iran. This followed the issuing of a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency to the UN Security Council, confirming that Iran had complied with its commitments under JCPOA.

"Against the backdrop of negative events in the world, this agreement is a bright spot and a breakthrough. I would like to underline that Kazakhstan played a

significant role in addressing this important international process. Thus, we organised two rounds of talks between the E3/EU+3 (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States, with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Iran in Almaty in 2013. International experts emphasise the key role of Kazakhstan in accelerating of this process," highlighted Mussinov.

The EU and the U.S. adopted the necessary legal acts to lift all sanctions taken in connection with the Iranian nuclear programme. Authorisation of dual-use goods should be granted by the competent authorities of the member states where the exporter is established.

Iranian persons who are listed under terrorism or human rights violations will continue to be subject to restrictive measures under these regimes which are outside the scope of JCPOA.

Asset Issekeshov, Kazakhstan's Minister for Investment and Development is planning to lead a delegation of about 170 officials and business people on a trade mission to Tehran on Feb. 6-8 as Kazakhstan seeks to explore the opportunities for co-operation in light of the changing environment.

Kazakhstan-Iran Business Forum Showcases Kazakh Interest in Iran

By Aiman Turebekova

Kazakhstan is interested in expanding bilateral trade and economic relations with Iran. The issue was raised during the Kazakhstan-Iran business forum on Feb. 6-8 in Tehran.

Some 270 Kazakh businessmen attended the forum, including 40 Baiterek Holding's partner companies, four so-called national business 'champions' (Alageum Electric, Caspian Beverage Holding, Eurasian Food Corporation and Zhigermunayservis) and 500 representatives of Iranian public and private firms.

A delegation led by Minister for Investment and Development of Kazakhstan Asset Issekeshov also discussed "the opening of the Euro-Asian market" for both, where "Kazakhstan can be one step whereby the Iranians may enter that market and vice versa," vice president for Kazakhstan's Agency for Foreign Direct Investment Almas Aidarov told to EFE agency.

"We will provide Iranian companies with any permit they need to start business in Kazakhstan," said Issekeshov during the forum. He also added that 900 Iranian companies are active in different fields, mostly in chemical

industries. Moreover, Kazakhstan imports some fruit and vegetables, as well as other goods from Iran.

The Kazakh entrepreneurs are interested in different fields, such as chemical and petrochemical production, construction, agriculture, textile, electronics, transport as well as finance and banking.

Alageum Electric, Eurasian Foods Corporation, Oil Affairs, Oxy Textile and other domestic companies discussed expanding export deliveries to the Iranian market.

Since the lifting of economic sanctions imposed on Tehran in 2005, there have been dozens of

visits by authorities from other countries seeking to revive trade and political ties with Tehran.

"We're here because we want to take advantage of opportunities for our companies. During the visit, we've spoken about how we're all open and interested in expanding our capacities. We're two relatively large economies in which there is still much room to develop," emphasised Aidarov.

A special attention was paid to cooperation in the field of export of Kazakh products to Iran, such as steel, building materials, pellets, grains and others.

As a result of the forum, a memorandum of understanding between the Baiterek Holding and the National Development Fund of Iran was signed defining the priorities of the companies' joint work in the fields of industrial and innovative development, informational technology and other industries.

Kyrgyzstan Pays off Debt For Gas

By Kseniya Voronina

The press service of the national company KazTransGas recently announced that Kyrgyzstan has paid off its debt to Kazakhstan for natural gas consumed after 2004. The total amount of \$41.6 million includes the gas supply prices, as

well as unauthorised gas pickup between 2004 and 2014.

KazTransGas was facing the problem of delayed payments coming from the Kyrgyz side for delivered gas over the past ten years. The Kazakh side warned the payer several times by sending official letters of demand to redeem the debt. The issue has been also repeatedly

considered on the intergovernmental level. In 2008, KazTransGas appealed to the court against Kyrgyz-Gaz, but despite the final prescript of the Specialized Inter-District Economic Court of Astana, the debt hadn't been extinguished.

In February 2014, the Russian gas operator Gazprom bought 100 percent of shares of KyrgyzGaz and be-

came an absolute owner of the assets of the Kyrgyz gas operator.

After that, numerous meetings and negotiations were held with the participation of KazTransGas and Gazprom Kyrgyzstan representatives, as a result of which both sides finally solved the problem. For now the Gazprom Kyrgyzstan company has no more arrears to the Kazakh side.

Tumbling Oil Prices, Global Economic Uncertainty Could Draw Kazakhstan and Iran Closer

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Headlines with the word "oil" often steal clicks these days, especially in oil-exporting Kazakhstan, as commodity prices and its national currency are directly correlated with global crude oil prices. Now, another headline-making word and nation has become especially important for Kazakhstan: Iran.

Ambassador of Iran to Kazakhstan Mojtaba Damirchiloo, in an exclusive for this story, shared his thoughts on why Iran is an important strategic partner for the Central Asian country, what is expected from bilateral cooperation between Iran and Kazakhstan, how his country coped with the challenges of international sanctions and provided his forecast for crude prices.

On the latter, Damirchiloo admitted that no oil-dependent country would benefit from falling oil prices.

"Current oil prices harm all producers, including Iran and Kazakhstan. The oil price has fallen by more than four times since June 2014, when it was \$115 a barrel. It is now [around] \$30. This comes after nearly five years of stability," he said, referring to the early February crude prices.

"The major oil producers have done nothing to cut production since October 2014, and they are unlikely to consider cutting out-



Mojtaba Damirchiloo

put any time soon. [The] major Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which controls nearly 40 percent of the world market, and non-OPEC producers, have different reasons to continue high output. Lower growth, coupled with lower need for oil, is not going to exceed supply for a long period of time. Thus the oil price is not going to rise anytime soon."

The ambassador explained that overproduction by "some OPEC and non-OPEC producers" by 2.5 million per day has caused an excess in the oil market.

"Historically, OPEC would intervene to strike a balance between supply and demand when there was excess oil in the market. At the latest meetings of OPEC, Iran asked members to reduce production and respect the ceiling, but OPEC

failed to reach an agreement on production curbs, sending the price tumbling. There is political will behind OPEC's indecision over a production ceiling in the organisation, and certain countries' insistence on overproduction is politically motivated. In this regard, the necessity of cooperation and coordination between the exporting and consuming countries in order to have a balanced market, in which continued supply and demand will be secured, is inevitable."

According to the ambassador, the current situation will draw Kazakhstan and Iran closer.

"[Neither Iran nor Kazakhstan], as oil producers, [are] happy with the existing prices, which will harm oil production in the long term. Both Iran and Kazakhstan, as the main oil producers, are suffering from falling oil prices be-

cause of [their] negative impact on their income and also in attracting investment for new oil projects. From this point of view, both Iran and Kazakhstan are interested in cooperation to persuade the major oil producers to have coordinated policies in oil markets," he said.

Going further, Damirchiloo touched upon some of the areas of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Iran that could be improved. Tourism is one such area.

"In the case of Iran and Kazakhstan, despite having [a] wide variety of commonalities and high potential, the current level of co-operation in the field of tourism is not satisfactory and we have to do a lot," he admitted.

Iran, with attractive natural and historical sites, is rated among the 10 most touristic countries in the world, Damirchiloo said, adding that "Iran could be an attractive destination for Kazakhs, as it was for the more than 6 million tourists that visited Iran last year."

"We can say the same for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan could be [an] attractive place for Iranians. Tourism can play an important role in Iran-Kazakhstan relations. Of course, it requires some pre-conditions, including introducing the tourism potential, facilitating connectivity, visa regime simplification, et cetera. Regarding a visa-free regime, Iran is ready to consider it on mutual agreement," he stressed.

Recently, the two countries agreed to establish new direct flights in addition to the existing two weekly flights by Mahan Air to Tehran from Almaty, the ambassador said.

"Now in the post-sanctions era, at the first step we have the issue of revival of the stalled or pending projects on the agenda and in the second phase, trying to define and implement new ones at the bilateral and multilateral levels and increasing trade turnover. We do hope to expand our cooperation in the fields of mining, agriculture, agribusiness, construction, energy, tourism, transportation and transit."

Coming out of the shadow of sanctions

"Iran, during the last three decades, has been under severe sanctions, beginning from the time of the triumph of the Islamic revolution in 1979, which resulted in the collapse of the authoritarian political system in Iran and the establishment of a democratic political system based on Islamic values," Damirchiloo said.

However "the experience of sanctions proves that they have not reached their goals, because there are numerous ways to deter them. Of course, they create problems, especially for ordinary people, by

increasing their expenses," the ambassador explained.

Iran has sustained, in the long-term, complicated and multi-layered sanctions in different fields including military activities, nuclear activities, civil aviation, oil, banking, shipping, insurance and more, said the ambassador, with different legal, political, economic and even psychological impacts.

With sanctions lifted, Iran is looking to a new era and will seek to expand its non-oil sectors.

"Iran's non-oil export has shown noticeable growth in recent years. The composition of Iran's non-oil export [has shifted] from primary and agricultural products to more processed goods, particularly petrochemical and other industrial products. Iran has a major competitive advantage in all industries that rely on gas, and related exports are on the rise. However, exports in the service sector (especially the export of engineering services) are also growing."

Key sectors that have the potential to contribute more to the country's economic income and export performance are "gas-based industries [like] petrochemicals, cement, steel and the power generation sector; agricultural and industrial food products, especially Iranian pistachios, fruits [and] fisheries; and high-tech based industries including medicine, transit, tourism and handicrafts, especially Iranian carpets." Iran is also focusing on renewable energy, which, in the context of the EXPO 2017 exposition, draws another parallel between the two countries.

On Feb. 11, Iran will celebrate its national day with events around the world and in the Kazakh capital.

Nation&Capital

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

PEOPLE

Story of 13-Year-Old Kazakh Eagle Huntress Shown at Sundance Film Festival

B2

COUNTRY

New Law Allows Foreign Agricultural Businesses to Lease Kazakh Land for 25 Years

B4

SPORTS

Team Kazakhstan Reaches Quarter Final in Futsal Euro Debut

B7

‘I Found My Soul in Photography,’ Says Andrey Kim, High-Flying Wedding Photographer



By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – A wedding day is one of the most important days in lives of most of people. Memories connected to that day depend on the hidden professional – a wedding photographer. Andrey Kim is one of the most highly-paid, recognised and recommended photographers in Kazakhstan. Locations of his wedding shoots go far beyond borders of the state. They include Thailand, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the

United Arab Emirates and Europe. “During a wedding photoshoot, the photographer is limited with the outfits, he has to work in any weather conditions, and also he has to face difficult situations, such as when newlyweds quarrel, so he has to make peace. And the main thing is that this day and event never can be repeated again. Every bride is glowing on that special day and so are parents. Everyone has a special magical mood. The photographer has to catch all

those beautiful moments. And he has to switch quickly between the actions,” said the extremely charismatic photographer in a recent interview for this story. “My goal is to create memories that will please even after 50 years. In my work, even the most shy and closed people will appear as happy and sincere with the real emotions that they are experiencing on this day,” he said, according to his website. In the social networks, Kim’s

bio describes him as photographer, sensei, CrossFit lover and traveler, which shows him as a person with wide range of interests and experience. During his seven-year professional career he was a photographer at 210 weddings. Kim was born in Karaganda and started his journey as a photographer while studying in a local medical university. “Photography came into my life back in 2007 when I was in the United States. First, I bought

myself video camera and I liked it. Then photo art became trendy and cameras were more affordable and I bought myself my first photo camera. In the beginning it was for fun. I remember taking pictures of almost everything. At that time I had not considered photography as a source of income,” he said. Kim and his friends used to party a lot and he started taking pictures in the places where they used to have a good time. “I think we stood at the cradle of the club pho-

tography in Kazakhstan. That was when people started inviting me more and more as a photographer. I started growing professionally,” he added. “I always liked creating something. Well, I cannot dance, sing or draw. But I found myself and my soul in photography,” said Kim. During this period, he was still a student and his hobby supported him financially for the last three years of studying. **Continued on Page B2**

Astana Debate Community Face Off Against World’s Best, Hope for More Support

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – The Astana Debate Community has earned respect in Central Asia for its achievements in argument, with speakers defending the honour of Kazakhstan in many global competitions over the past few years. Representatives of the Astana Debate Community spoke with The Astana Times about their experience and the need to raise the level of debate in Kazakhstan to the standards of the world’s top universities. Serik Iklassov, the debate society coordinator, monitors the activities of local clubs and arranges the contest schedule. He said that Astana’s team took part in the World Universities Debating Championship (WUDC) for the first time three years ago. This year, the 36th WUDC was held by the Debating Society of Greece

and the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki. There were about 400 teams and 400 judges from about 100 countries at the event, including eight participants from Kazakhstan: two speakers from KIMEP University and six speakers from Nazarbayev University. “Magzhan Sovetbek was selected by the organising committee as an independent adjudicator due to his successfully passing the adjudicators’ test. Nazarbayev University has become the first Kazakh university to be represented by two teams and an institution judge due to last year’s achievement in Malaysia, in the previous world contest, when Inkar Aitkuzhina and Madina Kabdualiyeva got to the semifinal in the English as a Foreign Language category. It was the first time representatives from Kazakhstan and Central Asia made it to the break rounds [semifinals] of such a huge event,” Iklassov



From left: Ruslan Kiimbayev, Inkar Aitkuzhina, Magzhan Sovetbek, Madina Kabdualiyeva, Azat Gabdolla, Aslan Sataibekov and Ravkat Mukhtarov.

said. “This year, our two teams got to the top 25 teams in this category, but unfortunately, they did not break into the semi-finals.” Despite not making the semi-

finals this year, Iklassov says the results of the last two years prove that the general level of debating in Astana has been raised. **Continued on Page B5**

Photosafari Photographers Document Wild Kazakhstan, Hope to Help Visitors do the Same

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – Undiscovered Kazakhstan, an exhibition created by Photosafari Group photographers, was presented in South Korea in December with the support of the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan. The display of 40 images taken all over Kazakhstan in 2014 and 2015 highlights the country’s most beautiful, diverse places. Exhibitions have also been held in Russia, Georgia, Italy, Hungary and China, and have received significant attention and drawn large audiences. The powerful images, revealing among other scenes a camel caravan in winter, the Milky Way above the steppe, the scenery around salty Lake Tuzkol, wild pistachio trees around the

Karatau Mountains, sunflower fields that evoke Van Gogh on the way to Altai and the stunning Martian landscape of Mangistau, serve to debunk the misconception that Kazakhstan is all steppe. Managers of the project Konstantin Kikvidze and Katherine Koshko spoke for this story about their passion for night photography and plans for developing domestic tourism in Kazakhstan. “The project was launched five years ago and since then we have visited almost all regions of the country. Our cooperation started with a photographers’ community on the Internet...The first photography expedition took place in 2006, when we went to the Altyn Yemel National Park. **Continued on Page B6**

Chairman of Georgian Ethno-Cultural Association: Georgians Chose Kazakhstan as Home

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – The fates and paths of different ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan crisscrossed the steppes for numerous reasons – most were deported and repressed under the Stalinist regime. Georgians, however, made the country their home by choice rather than by necessity. “There have never been mass migrations of Georgians, as opposed to other ethnic groups,” said Astana’s “Kolkheti” Georgian Ethno-Cultural Association Chairman Yelgudja Apkhazava in an exclusive interview for this story. “Georgians migrated to Kazakhstan individually when they wanted to do so. Perhaps the Ka-



Yelgudja Apkhazava

zakh hospitality, one of the traits that Georgians are also known for, influenced their moving decisions. Currently, there are about 200 people in Astana, no more,” he added. The association, with 16 members, has similar branches in Ak-

tau, Almaty, Atyrau, Karaganda and Taraz, according to the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (APK). The local group keeps in touch with the Georgian Embassy in the capital, the chairman stressed, which provides literature in the native language and national costumes for concerts for Sunday school children under the auspices of the State Ministry on Diaspora Issues of Georgia. Apkhazava, who moved to the city in 1983 and decided to stay and study, established the association in 2007 to become an active part of Kazakhstan’s multi-ethnic society. The country’s upcoming Day of Gratitude is one of the activities in which the association is engaged. **Continued on Page B2**

THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

RADISSON HOTEL

February 13 at 12 p.m. Int'l Educational Exhibition

ASTANA OPERA

February 13 at 6 p.m. Evening of Piano Music

February 14 at 6 p.m. Roden, Ballet

February 14 at 6 p.m. Aida, Opera

CONGRESS HALL

February 13 at 7:00 p.m. Symphony Music, Concert

SARY ARKA BRIDGE

February 14 at 12 p.m. Canine Winter Contest for All Dogs

ALAU ICE PALACE

February 14 at 9 p.m. Love Party for Valentine's Day

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Story of 13-Year-Old Kazakh Eagle Huntress Shown at Sundance Film Festival



By Georg R. Vassilenko

ASTANA – A documentary film “Berkutchi” (Eagle Huntress) was produced about a famous Kazakh girl eagle huntress from Mongolia, Tengrinews.kz reported Jan. 26.

The producer of the picture is Daisy Ridley, an actress who has become famous for her role in the film “Star Wars: The Force Awakens.” She has published photos of the young Aisholpan Nurgaiipykyzy from the Jan. 24 premiere

on her Instagram webpage. The premiere was held at the American Sundance Film Festival. Photos of the young eagle huntress have been widespread in social networks.

It is known that the 13-year-old eagle huntress is an ethnic Kazakh who lives in Mongolia. According to Radio Azattyk, Nurgaiipykyzy lives in the Altantsug area of the Bayan-Ulgi District in Mongolia. For the first time, materials on Nurgaiipykyzy were published in several British publications in the spring of

2014. She became popular worldwide after winning a major eagle hunting competition a few years ago, becoming the youngest participant. That is when nearly all foreign media, including the BBC and CNN became interested in her.

The film tells the story of the girl and her love for golden eagles. According to the film, for centuries this has been a men-only business. It is known that Nurgaiipykyzy’s father is a well-known eagle hunter in Mongolia as well. His an-

cestors to the seventh generation were involved in this lifestyle. In a family of four children, only Nurgaiipykyzy showed great interest and became the eagle huntress.

“Nurgaiipykyzy’s story impressed me so much that I wanted to be a part of this movie. I think that the story of this girl will be able to inspire many people around the world. I am proud to have taken part in this project,” said Ridley in an interview with the publication Deadline.

New Parasat Technology Centre Head Brings MIT Degree, Oil Industry Experience

By Lyazzat Krymbekova

ASTANA – Kanysh Satpayev Kazakh National Research Technical University announced Jan. 20 the appointment of Dastan Kozhabekov as Chairman of the Management Committee of the Parasat National Science and Technology Centre.

Commenting on this appointment, Iskander Beisembetov, rector of the university, said: “The President of Kazakhstan and the country’s legislature have created all the necessary conditions for successful commercialisation of scientific research. At the same time, it is important to re-address the mechanisms of business and scientific institutions integration to provide better support for commercialisation projects. It is important to ensure the funds are spent as intended and to build a platform to attract foreign investors, which will stimulate the development of the local science.”

According to Beisembetov, “the principles of commercialisation need to be reassessed not only to provide direct financial support for innovative projects, but also to guarantee the economic effect from the investments and to foster the creation of R&D-intensive technologies locally that will improve the efficiency of the local industries.”

“I am confident that many years of work experience in the R&D sector that Dastan Kozhabekov possesses together with the expertise acquired during his studies in Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) will allow him to fully achieve all the goals at the Parasat Centre,” he said.

Kozhabekov, 49, graduated from the Almaty Institute of Architecture and Construction, Industrial and Civil Construction Department with a degree in construction engineering. He received his MBA degree (Innovation and Global Leadership Programme) from MIT. He also completed in-



Dastan Kozhabekov

ternships at Georgetown University (Washington, USA) and Cambridge University (UK), as well as at Enbridge (Canada).

He started his career as a design engineer, and, since 1997, has worked in a number of top-level management positions at KazakhOil, KazTransOil, KazPetroMac, and KING. From 2008 to 2014, he was deputy general director of the Astana-based Kazakh Institute of Oil and Gas and in 2014-2015; he worked as its general director.

The Parasat Centre was founded by the Government of Kazakhstan in December 2014. It comprises the following organisations within its three main areas of operations:

Research and Development: a) the International Scientific and Industrial Holding Phytochemistry, JSC; and b) Altay Geology and Ecology Institute, JSC;

Commercialisation and R&D Support: a) Parasat Joint Stock Investment Fund for Risky Investments, JSC and b) the Centre for Innovative Technologies and Industrial Engineering, JSC;

Commercialisation and Technology Adoption: a) Kazakh-Belarus Joint Venture “Holography Kazakh-Bel”, LLP; and b) the Education and Scientific Center for Pilot Production of Aquaculture, LLP.

Chairman of Georgian Ethno-Cultural Association: Georgians Chose Kazakhstan as Home

Continued from Page B1

“We are currently preparing for the new celebration on March 1, the Day of Gratitude, where all ethno-cultural associations will present their cultural heritage. We will cook our national dishes, wear costumes and portray Sakhi, little Georgian national houses which were constructed with the help of the Astana city administration. These houses will have Georgian

drawings, souvenirs, handmade gifts and crafts inside.”

The chairman noted Kazakh business is widely represented in Georgia.

“There are many financial interactions between representatives of Kazakhstan’s business at the Batumi port, dealing mostly with grain and other general products. Recently a hotel was built in the resort town of Borjomi,” he said.

Apkhazava added he feels his

deep roots in Kazakhstan prevailed in his identity as a citizen.

“My children were raised here; I am used to this country. Sometimes I go to visit my relatives in Georgia and after 10-15 days I am homesick. I want to go back to Kazakhstan,” he said.

Asked what draws him to return, he admitted “close friends.”

“I am treated well by people. I also work on the railroad and I feel like I was born here. I don’t

feel as an alien but feel the attention of the people, their support, and I am happy to be living here. This is my favourite toast when we meet with friends – to this land, to our President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who manages despite the global tensions to keep peaceful skies over our heads. The small inconveniences we are facing today, they are temporary; everything will be fine soon. I am sure of it,” he said.

‘I Found My Soul in Photography,’ Says Andrey Kim, High-Flying Wedding Photographer

Continued from Page B1

At the age of 23, Kim started taking photos at weddings. “At that time, the price for a wedding photographer for one day was around 30,000 tenge (US\$82.17) and they did nothing interesting in my opinion. Also, I had an ambiguous attitude to wedding photography mainly due to the old-fashioned photos or impression that most of them wore awkward vests. I started looking at what Western professionals did. And I have to say they did really great. A photographer from Germany came to our city and I spent my first earned money to visit his master class,” said Kim, adding that he realised that if he were to become a wedding photographer, he had to be one of the best. “I wanted to raise the bar and to set new standards for Kazakhstan, bring international standards here.”

For a few years, photography remained Kim’s part-time job. After graduating university, he has worked as an emergency trauma surgeon at the National Research Centre for Emergency Care for two years. But the spirit of adventurer gave him no peace. He wanted to travel. Yet, the schedule and financial support of his job did not let him to pursue his dream. “Life of a photographer is freer than life of the doctor. And I had to choose,”



he said. At that time, he already has been having orders for around 40 weddings in a year.

After he quit his hospital job, he opened an office in Astana and left for three months to Thailand with

his wife. Since then, he has been in and out of the country. With his family, they have visited around 16 countries, and in every country Kim did photo sessions.

Today, Kim is one of the most

highly-paid professionals in the industry. Now his services for a wedding cost 930,000 tenge (US\$2,547). The price only for pre-banquet shoot is 360,000 tenge (US\$986). And also there is the most expensive package for newlyweds with the price of 1.64 million tenge (US\$4,492).

“There is no justification for such a price. All I can say is that I guarantee that no matter what happens I will give high-quality product. I had many different situations at the weddings, where a lot of specialists would give up. Like situations when brides had nervous breakdowns. But I had to deal with it. And everything happens very fast at weddings,” said Kim. Also, he emphasised that it is probably the most stressful event in life.

Now he has a whole team working with him at weddings.

“I can say that I make the best photobooks in Kazakhstan. And I am sure that I provide only the best services. In order to stay the best now we shoot only 2-3 weddings per month, because we prefer to highly concentrate on the actual shooting. We meet with couples, discuss the shooting, look for the best locations,” said the photographer.

Kim also is a founder of Business Photo Studio in Astana that offers high-quality business por-

traits and co-founder of the biggest photo studio in the city named Studio 40A, which offers professional photoshoots, including popular nowadays family photoshoots and a photography school for beginners.

Also, he is planning to launch Food Studio, which mainly will present different restaurants’ services using photo and video content for the clients.

Since 2011, Kim started his own master classes for wedding photographers to share his knowledge and experience with others, and he organises master classes with foreign specialists. He truly believes that photography needs to be developed within the country. He is one of the organisers of Kazakhstan’s

Forum of Wedding Photographers, which has been held for years.

According to him, the secret of success is about working and working and amateur becomes professional after 10,000 hours of work.

“The main difference between a professional and non-professional wedding photographer is that the professional guarantees the result despite everything,” he added.

Last year, Kim went to Nepal. Being fascinated by its beauty he and his friends organised a Nepal Appeal charity exhibition in Astana, Karaganda and Almaty out of photos collected during their 16-day trekking. All raised funds went to help victims of the devastating earthquake in Nepal in April 2015.



CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Emerging Kazakh, Silk Road Musical Talents Being Discovered Internationally

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – CNN.com, an American news network, published a list Jan. 27 of the emerging music artists of the modern Silk Road countries. It featured Azerbaijani jazz singer from Turkey Sanam Abdolazimzadeh, Chinese-American producer, musician and DJ Jeff Liang, Mumbai-based singer and songwriter Sohrab Nicholson, Desert Heat, a rap band from UAE, and Kazakh bedroom composer Arys Arenov.

“CNN set out to find the sounds of the modern Silk Road, from east to west discovering the artists whose talent will soon be crossing borders. We asked music experts across The Silk Road to name an emerging talent from each country,” highlighted the article.

Journalist Sophie Eastaugh noted the evolution of the new performers.

“When plucky traders trekked the silk route hundreds of years ago, the only sounds to accompany them were the thud of hooves,



Photo credit: express.kz

slow breath of camels and rush of the desert wind,” she wrote. “Today’s Silk Road travellers may go by plane, truck or bicycle, but there’s a good chance they’ve got music to stimulate their senses along the adventure.”

Arenov hails from Almaty, Kazakhstan’s largest city, according to the network. Although he spent his entire childhood dreaming about becoming an astronaut or

astrophysicist, he learned to play drums instead.

“There is a cool lyceum school for space study where I studied from grade six to nine; not so long, not much, but it was a very active and captivating period,” said Arenov in an interview early last year, according to Vlast.kz.

He later transferred to linguistic school and joined a vocal and instrumental ensemble where he

was asked to play drums. Arenov quickly perfected the instrument and played for a long time.

“A graphic designer by trade, he began playing the drums at 14 and soon started bedroom composing,” wrote Eastaugh. “In 2014, he was selected for Tokyo’s Red Bull Music Academy, where organisers hailed him as ‘a master of spaced-out disco.’ Yet his Kazakh influences are still prominent—several of his tracks feature the dombra, a traditional Kazakh string instrument.”

Red Bull Music Academy (RBMA) wrote, “Arenov makes music with a distinctly Central Asian twist.”

Look.tm, a fashion website, also described his style.

“Imagine cosmic disco scrolled through a tape recorder with the added background sound of an oriental bazaar. Shifting the love for progressive and psychedelic rock into his music, Arenov simultaneously gravitates to soft tunes, which imparts a big emotionality to his work,” it wrote.

RBMA’s final compilation, released in Tokyo in January 2015,

was comprised of 35 tracks composed by academy students. The album included “Tokyo Sunrise” written by Arenov and Pakistani musician Talha Asim Wynne (stage name Tollcrane), according to Red Bull Kazakhstan.

“Almaty might not have the biggest electronic music scene, but we know that Arenov is definitely one of its best and brightest,” noted Eastaugh.

Abdolazimzadeh records music in Istanbul and sings in both the Turkish and Azerbaijani languages. Before moving to Istanbul to pursue her career, she performed as an underground jazz and blues singer because women were banned from singing in her native Iran, according to the article.

Now based in Beijing, Liang grew up in Los Angeles, where his musical career led him to produce for the American rapper and actor known professionally as Snoop Dogg (Calvin Cordozar Broadus, Jr.)

“Liang has just released his first solo album ‘Flux,’ a skittering journey through soulful electronica and hip hop,” wrote Eastaugh.

Nicholson and producer/drummer Rohan Ramanna met at the latter’s music studio in 2014 and have since been writing and performing together, noted the article.

“Their stunning debut EP ‘For What’ was released in 2014 and last year the duo brought their haunting vocals and electronic soundscapes to the UK, playing live shows in London, Glasgow and Brighton,” it added.

Desert Heat brothers Salim and Abdullah Ali Dahman, who go by the rap names Illmiyah and Arableak, favour a more positive message opposed to the typical hip-hop genre treatise on drugs, violence and swearing. Illmiyah released “Stereotyped,” his first solo album, in December.

“[They use hip-hop to] give a voice to the youth of the Middle East,” wrote Eastaugh.

The CNN feature “The Silk Road: Past, Present, Future” travels east to west along the ancient trade route, exploring how traditional culture, arts, and trade have developed in the 21st century. This month it visits Scandinavia.

Kazakh Specialists Restore Ancient Artefacts Dated from Third Century B.C.

Staff Report

Artefacts dating from the third century B.C. have been restored over 16 years by specialists under the supervision of art restorer Krym Altynbekov, reported Kazpravda.kz, citing MIR 24 TV channel on Jan. 25.

Artefacts, including a fox fur coat, hat and stockings of a Saka



Krym Altynbekov

rider, were found at excavations in different regions of Kazakhstan and were very fragile to work with. Scientists found some of them in the mud of one of the mounds 16 years ago. They looked like clods of earth when they were brought to Almaty.

Specialists had to develop special chemical solutions to restore the findings. They help to recover materials made from wood and cloth.

“Organic matter is very fragile, delicate, exposed to rapid destruction because it is loved by bacteria. They eat chemical inclusions that are present in the soil. In the presence of moisture and heat, the temperature begins to rise and the destroying chemical process starts,” said the head of restoration laboratory Altynbekov.

More than 400 small crafts and jewellery were returned their lost appearance. Restorers will pass all these findings to the museums of Kazakhstan soon. For example, the decorations on the saddle, which are mythical animals in the form of leather and wood elements, now can be seen only with a magnifying glass, as only small fragments of the drawings has remained.

“There’s a special processing technique – colourful felting and edges are embroidered. This technology is still used in the Kazakh villages. This culture is directly linked to our modern culture, which survived only in rural areas,” said Altynbekov.

Theatrical Festival Showcases Seven Plays from 2015

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – International Performing Arts Festival Otkrovenie (Revelation) showed seven vivid plays of the past year Feb. 1-7 in Almaty, according to a Jan. 27 news report by the Tengrinews agency.

“A theatre is a living thing, not similar to any other type of art. It amazingly incorporates all the surrounding reality. ‘Revelation’ is that fragile dialogue which occurs between a viewer and an actor throughout the whole performance,” said Director of the festival and Theatrical Producer Olga Sultanova, according to the news agency.

This year’s festival was held without government support.

“It would be great if our society came to realise that financing culture is simply necessary; it could become a long term investment that could transform itself into an enormous educational and enlightening role,” stressed Sultanova in interview with Buro 24/7 internet project. “If we are to invest in it, our theatrical venues will become far better and competitive.”

According to her, without state support and considering the difficult economic situation, it was very difficult to make the festival this year.

“It helped us a lot that there are

indeed socially responsible companies of the lovely Almaty. Thanks to this, the festival continues to live. We are continuing to support the development of contemporary theatre, which is the most important,” she noted, according to Tengrinews agency.

Viewers could see the most interesting performances of independent and state theatres of Kazakhstan of the 2014-2015 season during the festival.

Among them are tragedies like “Odnoklassniki” (Classmates), “Sobaka” (Dog) and “Romeo and Juliet” (Zhas Sahn theatre, Mikhail Lermontov State Russian Academic Drama Theatre and

tion of Ada Falcon’s biography – “Lyubovnica” (Mistress), Raziya Khassanova’s independent theatrical project) and more, the news agency reported.

Sultanova said the arrival of award-winning and internationally-acclaimed physical theatre Gecko on tour to Kazakhstan means a lot for the country’s image.

“The arrival of Gecko to Kazakhstan is not only a compliment for the country, but also a tremendous exchange of experience for actors, directors and theatrical producers of Kazakhstan,” Sultanova mentioned, according to Buro 24/7.

According to her, the theatre’s “Institute” performance was not



Photo: Buro 24/7.kz

DER theatrical studio,) dramas “Tolstaya Tetrad” (A Thick Notebook) and “Institute” (Artishok experimental theatre, Gecko British physical theatre), tango interpreta-

shown anywhere else except for London and Edinburgh and after its premiere in Almaty organised with support from British Council Kazakhstan, Gecko will go on tour to

Georgia and begin performing there in March, the website reported.

Seminars, workshops and lectures of foreign experts and observers from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Armenia and Lithuania for practicing theatrical specialists will be held this year as part of the festival, Tengrinews reported.

International, festival and touring activity, theatrical producing, art management, working with an audience and all the new trends in contemporary theatre were among the topics for this year.

According to the agency, a series of performances by Kazakh artists in collaboration with actors dedicated to the artistic reflection of the city and thought about Almaty - the “Kal Kalai?” (How are you?) programme was also held as part of the Revelation festival.

“We decided to unite Kazakh artists and theatres. Artists use actors like ‘paint’ within the project,” said Director of the Arbatfest Festival Olga Veselova, Tengrinews wrote. “They [artists] become a bit of theatre directors and use actors in order to convey their thoughts and artistic statement. This translates into a performance genre.”

Otkrovenie is the only festival in Kazakhstan that engages in developing contemporary theatre as well as supporting independent theatres and theatrical projects in Almaty.

In 2016, the festival entered the international theatrical market, gained plenty of innovation and expanded its boundaries to all kinds of performing arts, according to the news agency. The main goal of the festival remained the same, which is forming and upbringing a younger generation of theatrical audiences.

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Over 3,000 Saiga Horns Seized in 2015

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – According to Chairman of Committee of Administrative Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan Maksat Baibolov, the damage from the poachers in 2015 totalled 618 million tenge (approximately US\$1.6 million), Interfax Kazakhstan reported.

The figure exceeded that of 2014 twice, Baibolov noted. In total, 123 men people were indicted, seven were imprisoned, while the rest were fined and faced minor charges. Meanwhile, 20 cases were closed as perpetrators were not identified.

In three years, the total damage was 1.1 billion tenge (\$2.9 million) or 310 shooting cases of saiga.

The damage from the poachers in 2015 totalled 618 million tenge (approximately US\$1.6 million).

The ministry has proposed to review a number of laws in the Criminal Code to help fight poaching.

“For instance, today Article 339 does not provide for such circumstances as repeated crime, causing significant or major damage, com-

mitted in the specially protected natural areas, as well as by a criminal group,” Baibolov explained.

On top of that, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, jointly with the Chinese authorities, needs to establish a communication bridge to prevent smuggling of saiga horns, Baibolov said.

There are three types of saiga antelopes in Kazakhstan: Betpak Dala, Ural and the least numerous from Ustyurt. As a result of public accounting of the saiga in 2014, their number was over 300,000. However, according to experts, more than half of that number was reduced due to the pasteurellosis outbreaks in the spring of 2015.



New Semey Store Accepts Payments in the Form of ‘Thank You’

By Georg R. Vassilenko

ASTANA – A new store has opened in Semey where certain customers don’t need money to make a purchase.

The store called “All for Thanks” allows residents of Semey to purchase items simply by saying the words, “thank you,” reported Tengrinews.kz on Jan. 23. The opportunity to get things for free is available only to certain categories of people – people with low income, large families and orphans. Semey’s public organisations, enjoying the direct support of the local akimat (city administration), are the initiators of the opening of this unique commercial facility.

“We were supported by entrepreneurs, the Association of Business Women, Public Association Istok, Family Centre and Women of Education Funds. Each of us surely owns things that we do not need, that are just laying around with no use. At the same time, someone out

there would find them very useful. We are now able to bring them to the store, and here someone might come and, so to speak, buy it for a ‘thank you,’” said Deputy Mayor of Semey Nadezhda Sharova.

In total, the city plans to open three such shops. Here, at no charge, a variety of things will be accepted from citizens, ranging from children’s clothes to consumer items. However, this does not mean everything will be accepted. The organisers are going to choose things that can really be useful to buyers.

“The items must be very clean. We will also look after hygiene in things. We will be accepting old and new things that are out of fashion. Both children’s and adult clothing and shoes. Perhaps, vendors will give us some of their merchandise from their stores for free,” shared Chairman of the Association of Business Women in Semey Ainur Argynbekova. “Just ‘thank you’ is all it takes to not make the people feel humiliated.”



KazISS among Top Three Think Tanks in Central Asia

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – The Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KazISS) has been nominated in four categories of the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report 2015 conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Programme (TTCSP) works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programmes and produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories.

TTCSP’s goal is to create lasting institutional and state-level part-

nerships by engaging and mobilising think tanks that have demonstrated their ability to produce high quality policy research and shape popular and elite opinion and actions for public good. The pool of scholars and practitioners includes 6,846 of the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories.

KazISS is among the top 100 in terms of security, defence and international affairs analysis. For the first time, the KazISS has been ranked 57th among the best government-affiliated think tanks. In the Central Asian regional ranking, the KazISS retains its position among the top three and it is ranked 33rd in energy and raw materials analysis.

These results illustrate the increasing role of KazISS, the pub-



lications of which are being cited abroad more frequently. The leading think tank of Kazakhstan was established on June 16, 1993, by decree of the Kazakh President.

Since its foundation, the mission of the KazISS as the national research institution is to provide analytical support to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

National Bank to Remain in Almaty, Plans for Relocation to Astana Cancelled

Staff Report

The Kazakh President recently halted plans to relocate the country’s National Bank from Almaty to Astana. The government had planned to move the bank in 2017.

“In two years, we are preparing to relocate the infrastructure and the head office to Astana. Nonetheless, Almaty remains a major financial centre. I think, two major cities will mutually complement each other in Kazakhstan’s financial development,” the then National Bank Chairman Kairat Kelimbetov said at the Astana Economic Forum in June, according to Tengrinews.kz.

The press service of the National

Bank responded to a recent inquiry from Kapital.kz, however, that President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed

a decree on Dec. 25, 2015, removing the requirement for the National Bank to relocate to Astana.



The National Bank was established on April 13, 1993 with the reorganisation of the Soviet Kazakh Republic’s bank. It is the central bank of Kazakhstan and presents the first tier of the state’s banking system. All other banks present the second tier of the banking system, except for Kazakhstan Development Bank, which has a peculiar legal status.

The National Bank is accountable to the Kazakh President and represents the interests of the state in relations with central banks, banks of other states, international banks and other financial organisations and coordinates its activity with the Kazakhstani government.

It remains the only central state body in Kazakhstan to be located outside of Astana.

New Law Allows Foreign Agricultural Businesses to Lease Kazakh Land for 25 Years

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Kazakh authorities recently amended the agricultural sector legislation, allowing the country to prolong land leases, facilitate tax administration and provide investment preferences for foreign investors, reported LS, the local web portal.

The land lease term for foreign companies has increased from 10 to 25 years, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. The Agribusiness 2020 programme will subsidise investments at the rate of 30-80 percent in priority areas. The volume of investments in the agricultural sector in 2015 was 167 billion tenge (US\$457 million).

“Chinese companies are interested in establishing joint ventures



in Kazakhstan for processing agricultural products (meat, oil, grains and tomato processing plants) and establishing feedlots, with further promotion of the Kazakh products for export,” noted the ministry.

The Ministry of Agriculture is working to attract Chinese companies to Kazakhstan, in particular such large multinational corporations as Rifa Holding Group, CITIC, AIJU and COFCO.

Rifa Holding Group will invest in the construction of the East Kazakhstan region meat processing plant. The facility will have an annual capacity of 17,000 tonnes of lamb and beef feedlots, while simultaneously feeding 50,000 head of sheep and goats and 1,000 head of cattle.

In total, 80 percent of the companies will be focused on exporting to China. The total project cost is estimated at 7.9 billion tenge (US\$21.5 million), with Rifa Holding Group’s share amounting to 49 percent. The company also intends to cooperate with a number of Kazakh companies in beef production.

CITIC, one of the leading investment corporations in China, is interested in investing in the livestock sector. The company

recently signed an agreement with Baiterek National Holding to implement investment projects in the agricultural sector. The corporation intends to finance the construction of broiler poultry farm feedlots on an industrial scale.

Working jointly with Total Impex in the North Kazakhstan region, AIJU, the Chinese industrial group, is advancing an oil and cereals deep processing investment project worth \$58 million. The yearly capacity of the plant is 200,000 tonnes each of flour and fodder and 80,000 tonnes of vegetable oil.

Producing and processing Kazakh tomatoes has become a priority for COFCO. The company is seeking cooperation with Eurasia Agro to invest in projects to de-

velop a cluster of tomato-growing and tomato paste production facilities in Kyzylorda, East Kazakhstan and West Kazakhstan regions. The projects are worth more than \$80 million in the areas of tomato cultivation and products. Due to the joint projects, there are plans to increase tomato production to 120,000 tonnes.

Oriental Patron, a financial group from Hong Kong, and a partner intend to invest approximately \$500 million to develop the Kazakh company Kazexportastyk. The funds will be used to develop the deep processing of agricultural products for further promotion in the Chinese market.

The Ministry of Agriculture will sign a joint action plan with the Chinese companies to implement the projects.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Pavlodar's New Landmark: Giant Robots

By Julia Rutz

Iron giants created by a group of car mechanics are now guarding one of Pavlodar's auto repair shops. The idea to creatively convert waste parts into robots came to garage owner Andrey Sukhonosenko, reported Tengrinews.kz.

"This happened spontaneously. We tried making small iron figures, such as hedgehogs, dogs, mannequins and candle holders. Our mechanics used everything they could find in the garage and what was left by previous clients – suspension parts, engines, chains, valves and pistons. As we really enjoyed the process, we decided to try our skills and create something big. This is how our robots were born," he said.

The first creation was a two-metre high cyborg, which should remind customers of the guardian from the movie "Stargate," followed by a four-metre high robot which weighs about two tonnes. It took more than a month to create the giant.

"We wanted to make the robot look as human-like as possible, so it cost a lot of work and time, but we made it. The robot is made from a lorry loader, combine and mowing machine spares. Some of our clients brought us additional material so we could continue working, some parts we bought in the market," said Sukhonosenko.

The manufacturing process of the robot's head appeared to be the most time-consuming, as it was sawed by hand with the help of grinder.

"Once, one of our clients was close to having a heart attack when he came into the garage. The robot was almost ready and stood behind the corner of one of the boxes.



The man was talking on the phone when he suddenly noticed a great iron something right next to him. He jumped aside and dropped the phone on the floor, however all ended up well. We all laughed and took a selfie," said Sukhonosenko.

The idea to turn spare parts into something artistic was part of the entrepreneur's anti-crisis plan. It was obvious that in the current challenging time in the market, employees needed to find a passion at work.

The number of clients has dramatically dropped as a result of the current crises, so he decided to stock the waste materials and use the available

free time and great skills of the team members to create something inspirational. Not all of the guys believed in the venture, but when they saw the first results of the work, even those who did not initially have a creative spirit came up with brilliant new ideas and proposals.

The team is so inspired they even want to make the robots move and their eyes twinkle, said Suchonosenko. As for now, the popularity of the automotons continues to grow. Not only clients of the repair shop, but other locals and guests of the city come to take a picture with the iron giants.

Disabled Citizens Should Be Represented in Legislative Bodies, Say NGOs

By Talgat Issenov

A number of representatives of different Kazakh non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the rights of persons with disabilities recently announced their willingness to attain places in legislative bodies of the country.

The corresponding statement was made in the Press Club of Kazakhstan by Chairman of the Union of Organisations of Disabled People of Kazakhstan Ali Amanbayev, Chairman of the Shyrak Association of Women with Disabilities Lyazzat Kaltayeva and Chairman of the Namys Public Associations of Disabled Persons with Higher Education Kairat Imanaliyev.

The speakers emphasised that according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, handicapped citizens should participate in develop-



Kairat Imanaliyev (L), Lyazzat Kaltayeva (C) and Ali Amanbayev (R) at the press conference

people in executive and legislative bodies all over the country.

It was also mentioned that the Union of Organisations of Disabled People of Kazakhstan supports the earlier initiative of

"This is the right time to implement changes and let disabled Kazakh citizens directly participate in legislation's developments. Many of them have higher education diplomas; some of them participated in various studies and know how to provide special social services or to develop a draft law. Their active participation in legislative activities at the regional and national levels will create appropriate conditions for the quality improvement of life of people with disabilities living in Kazakhstan. Our organisation calls all political parties to include persons with disabilities to their electoral lists for the upcoming Mazhilis and maslikhat elections," said Amanbayev.

AMANBAYEV: "This is the right time to implement changes and let disabled Kazakh citizens directly participate in legislation's developments."

ing programmes and policies that are directly related to their rights and needs. It was noted that the convention, which was signed by Kazakhstan in 2015, has called to provide membership for disabled

deputies of the lower house of Parliament to dissolve itself and hold elections for Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) and maslikhats (local representative bodies).

Kazakhstan Moves Up Three Slots on Latest Corruption Perception Index

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – Kazakhstan last year scored 28 points, moving from 126th in 2014 to 123rd place in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.

Based on expert opinion from around the world, the CPI assesses perceived levels of public sector corruption worldwide on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

The calculation of the CPI carried

out in Kazakhstan was based on eight international researches; experts in surveys and questionnaires answered questions about their perception of the level of corruption in Kazakhstan in the spheres, such as economy, law and democratic reforms.

The main positive points raised by experts are large-scale legislative initiatives taken in the field of combating corruption and ensuring the transparency and accountability of public authorities. In particular, the ongoing work in the area of improving systems for pro-

viding public services to the population was positively noted.

However, corruption remains a problem for Kazakhstan. According to the report, to solve this concern, it is necessary to strengthen democratic procedures in public administration, to solve problems in the field of law enforcement and level the risks associated with shadow economy growth.

Denmark reached the top spot for the 2nd year running, while North Korea and Somalia turned out to be the worst performers, scoring just eight points each.

Housing Construction Bank Develops Anti-Crisis Programme

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – The Housing Construction Bank of Kazakhstan (HCBK), which is a subsidiary of Baiterek Holding, has developed a new anti-crisis programme, Svoi Dom ("Own House"), until 2020 to provide depositors with affordable housing, reported Zakon.kz on Jan. 26. It promises to provide 350,000 square metres of affordable housing in 2016 and a total 1.5 million square metres by 2020.

The new programme has three main directions: cooperation with the local authorities, public and private partnerships as well as cooperation with commercial banks. At the moment, the bank is negoti-

ating with local government bodies, second-tier banks and property developers.

The main advantages of the programme are full priority to depositors of HCBK, the low price per square metre, independence from exchange rates and the absence of special conditions for the acquisition of property. Any client of the bank can take part in the programme, but depositors who are not owning any property are in priority and receive the right to purchase an apartment first. There is also another state programme of regional development until 2020, which was launched earlier. The difference is that Svoi Dom has not required registration in the cities of Almaty and Astana

for the last two years. Another feature of the new programme is that people are able to select a property developer and the house project through an open vote. The programme will be financed by the bank's equity.

At the moment, average price of the housing within the programme is about 180,000 tenge (US\$490.86) per square metre. The annual interest rate of the loan is between 5 to 10 percent.

According to the source, the anti-crisis programme of the bank will be an excellent addition to the state programme of development of regions until 2020 because depositors of HCBK will get an alternative way to buy housing at affordable prices.

Astana Debate Community Face Off Against World's Best, Hope for More Support

Continued from Page B1

"Our debaters are interested in taking international experience and transferring it to the community," he said.

According to Iklassov, organising a major competition with the participation of foreign judges and debaters in Kazakhstan would make the country more competitive in debates.

"We believe that such events will benefit not only the tourism sphere, but also the students who take an active part in the organisation. Participating in international tournaments is very useful for teams. The experience gained at such events increases the level of debate techniques. The representatives of their communities will transfer the experience to members within the community in the

form of training, joint games and refereeing. Thereby, we raise the level of debate both in the city and in other regions of the country," Iklassov said.

Ruslan Kiimbayev, winner of the National Championship Tournament, the Astana Cup and the Central Asia Cup, is currently doing a master's degree at Ljubljana University and is still involved in debating.

In his opinion, it is necessary to create an atmosphere of competition for the development and motivation of debaters, and to do that, English-language tournaments should be arranged more often.

"Style, training and refereeing at the WUDC are somewhat different from the way we used to debate in the English league in Astana. Trainings run by former

participants, video reviews followed by rounds of debates [and] writing case studies will help [debaters] build up experience and effectively adapt to the standards of the WUDC. Of course, knowledge and erudition are essential for a successful speech. You should be up-to-date on different issues and constantly replenish your knowledge. I learned critical thinking and team spirit [while debating], as you should carry out an analysis of your performance, take into account judges' feedback and improve your style of debate at the club's meetings," Kiimbayev said.

Nazarbayev University students Aitkuzhina and Kabdualiyeva, being the most experienced English League players in Astana, participated in this year's competition, the largest non-sporting event in

Greece this year.

They noted that debating plays a great role in students' lives. It takes a lot of time, but it contributes incredibly to their academic and intellectual development in exchange.

"Global tournaments give us enormous experience in developing our critical thinking, argumentation [and] communication skills and getting valuable experience from the world's best judges. We've met students from the world's leading schools, [like] the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Yale University, the London School of Economics and Political Science and Harvard University, and debated against them on the most important issues, such as fighting terrorism, ecological degradation, women's empowerment, human

rights, religion, economic rights and working conditions of people in developing states. We gained a lot of knowledge and practised so much all these years, and now we are glad to share our know-how with other students. If we have another opportunity to go abroad to represent our university and country, we definitely will," the two said.

Being a good debater is not defined only by winning. Aitkuzhina and Kabdualiyeva noted. "Good debaters should constantly invest their time and resources into the development of debating and public speaking skills, as well as regularly widen their world outlook."

The young orators said the number of speakers capable of debating in English should be increased. Currently, the Russian League dominates the debat-

ing movement and the number of competitions in the English League is much smaller by comparison. This problem is significant, because unless students in Astana are able to speak fluently in English, the chances of Kazakhstan winning on the global level or progressing quickly are quite low.

"We need to develop debating in English and attend more global events," Aitkuzhina and Kabdualiyeva said. "Our community also needs government support for such things as debates, to have the practical application of the knowledge we acquire during debates. Debating in the world's top universities makes up the core of student extracurricular activities, while in Astana it is a rather unusual kind of hobby. Not all universities are capable of sending their students to overseas tournaments, and even if there are people who are competitive enough, money is a powerful hindrance. This problem is difficult to solve, but it would be immensely helpful if debaters could receive governmental and/or nongovernmental support," they said.

TOURISM&EXPO 2017

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Astana EXPO 2017 Chairman Briefs President Nazarbayev on Exhibition Preparations

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – Astana EXPO 2017 national company chairman Akhmetzhan Yessimov updated President Nursultan Nazarbayev Jan. 26 on the status of preparations for the upcoming international exhibition.

Yessimov indicated 70 countries have already confirmed their participation, while 35 other nations are considering involvement. The number is expected to reach 100 countries as planned in a registration dossier. In addition, large multinational companies are showing a high level of interest in the exposition.

The chairman also noted an additional 53 billion tenge (US\$140 million) will be saved in terms of expenditures, which including previous cuts, totals 131 billion tenge (US\$354.2 million). By reducing a number of top managers and optimising the staff by 12 percent, only six of 15 top managerial positions have been left.

Regarding EXPO 2017's information campaign, Yessimov noted the exhibition staff had the oppor-

tunity to promote the event at the recent World Economic Forum 2016 in Davos.

The President's initiative to establish an International Centre for the Development of Green Technologies and Investment Projects under the UN auspices using the EXPO 2017 infrastructure is becoming popular among other states, he added.

Regarding construction, building materials have been supplied by more than 230 Kazakh companies at a cost of 77 billion tenge (US\$203 million). Despite the current tough economic environment, he noted EXPO 2017 is one of the projects that has created new jobs while preserving existing ones. Development is being conducted in accordance with the planned schedule and will be completed this year, followed by the filling pavilions with content.

Nazarbayev stressed EXPO 2017 has a full schedule in the coming months. In particular, he emphasised the need to finalise the list of exhibitors and determine the informative content of the Kazakh pavilion and similar facilities of the other countries. Nazarbayev

reiterated the need to ensure the city's proper infrastructure for the event and its guests, as well as prepare a cultural programme and encourage volunteers.

The exhibition will have an impact on many areas of life in the capital and the country at large and the task of the state is to ensure the maximum benefit. Given the large influx of tourists, developing the facilities to accommodate them is paramount.

The number of people including Kazakhstan in their vacation plans has been growing each year. According to statistics from the Ministry for Investment and Development, 519,222 tourists came to the country in 2012, increasing to 586,000 in 2013 and 679,018 in 2014.

EXPO 2017 will be important in terms of developing the hotel sector, as the capital is expected to be inundated by visitors. To provide for the anticipated travellers, 38 hotels currently in the design stage will be opened by 2017. These are in addition to the city's current count of 146 registered hotels with a total of 5,570 rooms.

Almaty, Astana Flights to Balkhash and Alakol Resorts to Begin in Summer

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – The Kazakh Ministry for Investment and Development announced recently that twice-weekly flights will begin from Astana and Almaty to the Balkhash and Alakol Lake and Borovoye.

According to the ministry, citizens of Russia, China, India and Iran are particularly interested in visiting Kazakhstan as tourists. Therefore, local resorts are being encouraged to improve their infrastructure and encourage staff to learn foreign languages.

During nine months of 2015, Kazakh resorts served nearly half a million visitors. The most popular areas among tourists are Alakol Lake and Borovoye.

"The number of tourists visiting Kazakhstan has been increasing year by year. For instance, in 2012, there were 519,222 visitors; Kazakh hotels served 586,038 tourists in 2013, whereas 679,018 foreigners came to Kazakhstan in 2014," said the ministry.

At the end of last year, Almaty region Akim (Governor) Amandyk Batalov announced that two five-



Lake Balkhash

star hotels are planned to be built in the Alakol area.

Alakol Lake is the second largest inland salty reservoir in Kazakhstan. Its waters are comparable in qualities to those of the Black Sea and include almost every element present in the periodic table. The holiday season starts in May when the water of the lake is already warm and ends in September.

The unique wealth of Alakol Lake is mud used to treat various joint diseases, radiculitis and skin ailments

and aid in recovering from injuries. Thalassotherapy, healing by taking sea baths, has been successfully used to treat various diseases of the peripheral nervous system.

Balkhash Lake is a large inland water body but smaller than the Caspian and Aral seas. A western basin that receives water from the previously abundant Ili River is fresh; the eastern part of lake is salty. Ili-Balkhash basin is famous for its biodiversity and reproduction of valuable fish species.

Photosafari Photographers Document Wild Kazakhstan, Hope to Help Visitors to Do the Same

Continued from Page B1

Then we created Photosafari.kz, an association involved in organising trips to different natural locations for photographers. We earned money primarily for car repairs and equipment. We took the best pictures and we worked out brilliant travel routes and found incredible locations, coupled with gaining precious experience during this period. We now are focused on implementing our own noncommercial and commercial projects," they said.

Kikvidze said there are only a few things that really matter in life: a road, a car and the sunset. "We are especially captivated by night scenery and love shooting skies full of stars," the photographers added.

The key to their exquisite photographs is planning correctly for the road. The expedition team, consisting of eight to 12 photographers, videographers, art critics, historians and zoologists, chooses their trip equipment based on the duration of their trip, their destination, the time of year and the

weather conditions. They have to bring all the necessary equipment not only to shoot, but also to survive in the field.

"It is not always possible to plan in advance, as sometimes the weather and other factors may significantly affect the course of the route. It is necessary to sacrifice sleep or food in order to get the best images and, of course, to climb and reach the most inaccessible places. It is possible to come across rare poisonous spiders, scorpions and snakes, or you may easily encounter a bear in the Altai Mountains. But if these animals are not disturbed, you can avoid danger. In addition, they are all of interest to us for pictures and video, so you always need to find a balance between risk and good images," they explained.

According to Kikvidze and Koshko, the wonder of Kazakhstan is its variety of landscapes, which make it unique in the world.

"No country, except perhaps the United States, can boast such nature and landscape wealth. We have mountains, steppes, forests, deserts and lakes, and all these nat-

ural zones are in relative proximity to each other. In fact, Kazakhstan needs to develop eco-tourism, and this requires information [and] photo and video materials. Among other things, we, of course, are eager to satisfy our own passion as travellers. We really always wanted to see and visit those regions as part of the project and we look forward to new trips because each time we discover these places in a new light. We remember our visit to the Aktolagai Mountains, situated at the bottom of an ancient ocean that existed for tens of millions of years. Can you believe this? There are ancient deposits of shells, remains of sea urchins and mollusks, fossilised coral and other bits from the sea floor. We brought home a lot of underwater relics and even a fossilised shark tooth," said the photographers.

Kazakhstan's wild places have inspired them to new horizons this year, they say.

"We have big plans for this year. We are currently working on a new project. The presence of several natural zones and unique landscapes and culture makes for huge

potential for Kazakhstan...to take its place in the list of most-visited countries. We have developed unique routes of varying complexity and destinations based on our

vast experience and understanding of the nuances of each region of the country. We intend to organise walking tours, ski tours, photography tours, bicycle tours and tours

with camper vans. We sincerely believe that tourism will improve the national economy and play a significant role in employing the population," they said.



Photo by Konstantin Kikvidze

Destination – Kazakhstan. What Should I Know?

By Julia Rutz

Experienced travellers looking for something new and different may find themselves exploring the opportunities Kazakhstan can offer. Visitors can take a train and watch the endless Kazakh steppe roll by; gape at the modern architectural marvels of the capital city, Astana; ski or go horseback riding in the mountains south of Almaty; or visit a jewel of the ancient Silk Road and Kazakhstan's most impressive Islamic monument, the city of Turkestan. However, as the country is still little known in the travelling community, most potential tourists will have to deal with a lack of information about Kazakhstan and its culture. After going through several major travel and tourism blogs dedicated to the biggest Central Asian state, The Astana Times gathered a list of questions foreign visitors most frequently ask.

What is the best season to travel to Kazakhstan?

First of all, it depends on which

part of the country you would like to visit. Kazakhstan is the ninth largest nation in the world and different regions tend to experience different weather patterns. Moreover, the country has seasonal extremes with hot summers and cold winters. In general, the best time to come is between May and September.

What do people eat in Kazakhstan? Can I find vegetarian restaurants there?

Unlike many foreigners coming from the West, the local population is not generally as concerned with eco-friendly eating habits. Meat is the primary ingredient in most dishes served in Kazakhstan (after all, Kazakhs like to joke that they are second in the world in terms of meat consumption after... no, not Argentinians... but wolves), but this doesn't mean that tourists won't be able to find something to accommodate a vegetarian diet, including vegetarian menus in some restaurants. However, you should be ready for a limited choice of ap-

propriate products for vegetarians or vegans, particularly in smaller cities or the countryside. Only a few restaurants located mostly in Almaty and Astana offer a variety of plant-based food.

What language do people speak in Kazakhstan? Can I use English for communication?

Kazakhstan is a bilingual country: the Kazakh language has the status of "state language," while Russian, which is spoken by almost all citizens, is the "language of inter-ethnic communication." In big cities it is possible to get by with English, especially if you talk to the under-35 crowd, but this language is definitely not a lingua franca in Kazakhstan. If you want to travel alone, make sure you have learned some necessary phrases in Kazakh and/or Russian before coming.

What should I know about Kazakh etiquette and customs?

The common greeting is the handshake; once you have de-

veloped a personal relationship, friends of the same sex may prefer to hug. Kazakhs are known for their great hospitality, so you may be invited to someone's house for dinner. It is polite to bring something for the hostess, such as pastries. In more rural settings, you may sit on the floor. Hierarchy is respected in Kazakhstan, so someone very senior is never criticised, especially in public. Most locals tend to speak in a roundabout fashion and respond more favourably to gentle probing rather than direct questioning.

What are the must-have souvenirs from Kazakhstan?

There are many options to memorialise your trip to Kazakhstan with a good buy. As handicraft work is pretty well developed in the country, you can purchase intricate felt rugs or wall hangings, prized for their lively colours and detailed work. Other unique souvenirs are a Kazakh water flask made from hand-tooled leather or a miniature yurt, the traditional

dwelling of Kazakhs. Some tourists prefer to take exotic dishes or drinks back home, such as kumis, a mildly alcoholic drink made from fermented mare's milk; shubat, fermented camel's milk; kurt, a cheese made from dehydrated sour cream; or boursaks, little balls of fried dough similar to a savoury or doughnut.

Whether it is your first trip to Kazakhstan or you have already

been to Central Asia, the most important thing to know is that Kazakh citizens are very hospitable and to treat a stranger properly is a priority in their culture. Moreover, most people are very curious about other nations and cultures, so every tourist coming from abroad will become a small-scale celebrity and will easily find new friends ready to show them more about the Kazakh homeland.



Photo: in.thekad.com

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Team Kazakhstan Reaches Quarter Final in Futsal Euro Debut



Dinmukhambet Suleimenov (top) celebrates after scoring against Croatia.

By Anuar Abdrakhmanov

ASTANA – The Kazakh national futsal team reached the quarter-finals in its first-ever appearance at the UEFA Futsal Championship (Futsal Euro), which is taking place this year Feb. 2 – 13 in Belgrade, Serbia.

Futsal is a variant of soccer played indoors on a smaller field. Kazakhstan's record of success in the sport is associated with AFC Kairat Almaty, which won the UEFA Futsal Cup among professional clubs in 2013 and 2015. However, the national team's only tangible achievement, until this year, has been qualifying for the FIFA Futsal World Championship in 2000, where they lost all three matches against host Guatemala; the sport's most titled team, Brazil; and Portugal. Five previous attempts to reach the UEFA Futsal Championship failed to bring fruit before last year, when Kazakhstan managed to beat Georgia, Romania and perennial European favorites Portugal before eclipsing Bosnia and Herzegovina in the playoffs to secure a place for the first time at the tournament's final stage in the Serbian capital.

The tournament started with a tough challenge, facing the powerful Russian team, Futsal Euro 2014 runners-up and winners of the tournament in 1999. In two previous meetings with them, Kazakhstan was crushed, 0:4 and 1:5.

"We have long waited for this to happen, so we appreciate the tournament's importance for [fans in] Kazakhstan. All our thoughts are now on the game with Russia. The team is motivated and we want to challenge the powerful rival," was a pre-match comment from Kazakhstan's captain, Dinmukhambet Suleimenov.

In the end, Kazakhstan managed to give the Russians a decent fight. In the early seconds of the match, Douglas Jr. put up a kick that bounced off the crossbar, and the sides went on to exchange dangerous attacks.

In the 12th minute of the match, Russia's Romulo secured a lead for his team, and then scored again only 28 seconds later. Kazakhstan hit the net only once in the first half, when goaltender Higuita charged to the first time at the tournament's final stage in the Serbian capital.

The second half was a chess match, as the Kazakh team played long combinations in front of the opponents' goal, waiting for them to make a mistake. Higuita's incursions into the other half of the pitch increased in intensity, but the solid Russian defence allowed only a couple of limited chances, and the game ended with an honourable 1:2 loss for Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's second game was against Croatia, also experienced players, with a top-four finish in 2012.

The game started slowly, as both teams played pretty defensively, but in the sixth minute, Douglas Jr. drew first blood for Kazakhstan. A minute later, the Croats took advantage of a mistake by Suleimenov and Vedran Matosevic hit the empty net to equalise. Almost immediately, the Kazakh captain made a solo slalom into the opposing penalty area and restored his team's advantage. In the 17th minute, Zhamankulov made it 3-1.

By the second half, Kazakhstan was firmly in control of the situation. Zhamankulov was clinical again while Croatia managed only one more goal, by Josip Suton. The 4:2 final result is seen as sensational progress for Kazakhstan, bringing them to the quarterfinals.

"This is an exceptional outcome for Kazakhstan. The players fulfilled their tasks. All 14 are spirited fighters, as they clearly proved in this game by giving everything on the floor," Kazakhstan head coach Ricardo Sobral (who goes by the name of Cacau) commented following the historic match.

The quarterfinal against current European title holders Italy was played Feb. 9 as this issue went to print.



Kazakhstan lineup ahead of its Futsal EURO debut game against Russia.

Kazakh Snowboarding – Young and Promising, Says Head of Almaty Federation

By Zhazira Dyusseembekova

ASTANA – Snowboarding, one of the most fascinating and breath-taking winter sports, is relatively new in Kazakhstan but already very promising. President of the Almaty Federation of Freestyle and Snowboarding Askar Valiyev sees great prospects in developing the extreme activity and a bright future for the nation's athletes.

"For Kazakhstan snowboarding is a very perspective sport, because the country has the tradition of winter sports. It is a young sport and I believe it has a big future. It is very interesting and trendy for the youth as well," he said in a recent interview for this story.

Advanced in the United States in the 1960s, snowboarding became an Olympic sport in 1998. The trend came to Kazakhstan in the early 2000s, when the first commercial competitions took place at Shymbulak Resort in Almaty.

Snowboarding is only being promoted in East and South Kazakh-

stan, due to the presence of mountains and domination of steppe areas in the other territories. To date, the best result for the country's snowboarding team was by Valeriya Tsoi, who won the license to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. It was the first, but hopefully not the last Olympics for Kazakh athletes in the sport.

Valiyev has served in his post

since the federation was founded in 2009. A former professional snowboarder, he represented the national team in the world championships and 2007 Universiade. Valiyev, who won the Almaty and national championships and worked as a member of the Sochi organising committee, noted the number of people who watched snowboarding on TV during the

games exceeded those who viewed men's hockey.

"Snowboarding is a very popular sport among youth. From all the winter sports, I would characterise it as the most Kazakh. I mean, Kazakh people have never skied. But they rode horses, so in some ways it can be compared to riding a horse when jumping on the bumps," he said, smiling.

Shymbulak has a special club for children, where they can learn snowboarding basics. Sport School No. 7 in Almaty also has a snowboarding division.

"Unfortunately, after me and my friends used to be engaged in the sport actively, somehow the next generation was not formed. For now, we have only a few bright athletes who can take part in the championships at the international level. But everything can change in the next few years, because the next Universiade is coming and we have a group of young snowboarders that is actively preparing for it. Also, we need to send our team to the next Winter Olympics in Pye-

ngchang, South Korea. To achieve that, we have to work hard," said Valiyev.

The sport is facing some difficulties in its expansion, he added.

"Snowboarding is a capital-intensive sport. It requires special courses for training, not like regular slopes in tourist resorts. Those courses require money. Also, there is a need for special equipment and uniforms. Athletes should take part in high-level competitions in order to develop their professional skills. The nearest training base is located in Russia, which also requires money to go," he explained.

"The federation understands that not all the sports should be financed by the state. Some professional sports can be financed by the state, but for the younger generation and children another alternative source of financing should be attracted. Support from the local authorities is necessary as well," he said.

Valiyev suggested the possibility of initiating a public-private partnership which would bring

social benefit and profit to its owners, such as the one proposed by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

"Here in Almaty we are missing a ski or snowboard venue where the Almaty team could train stably and which could host national and city championships or other continental contests with the participation of athletes from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, South Korea, Japan and China," Valiyev noted.

"Existing resorts are not suitable, because they mainly were created for tourists, for comfort riding, not extreme sport. That might be a very attractive investment project – creation of the special facility for freestyle snowboard disciplines. There, people of different ages will be able to train and different events and parties could take place as well. During summer, it can be used for skateboarding and summer sports," he said.

The Olympics have five snowboarding categories, although only parallel giant slalom and snowboard cross exist in Kazakhstan. Half-pipe, big air and slopestyle require acrobatic training and special courses.

"It would be great if we had special snowboarding and freestyle venues with the facilities to compete in skiing and snowboarding," said Valiyev.

Golovkin: Match against Alvarez Might Take Place in September

By Yerzat Sergazin

ASTANA – During a recent press conference in Astana, Genady Golovkin named Mexican Saul Alvarez as a potential opponent this year.

"I think that the fight against Alvarez is realistic this year, around September, so let's wait for September," Golovkin said.

He also told the local media that there are dozens of opponents he might face, but most of them are unknown to him.

"There is a lot of information on the Internet but it is not always reliable. My main goal is to unite all belts in the middleweight category and I am on my way to this goal," he said.

According to local media, Matvei Korobov, already defeated by Golovkin in an amateur encounter, wants a rematch with the Kazakh boxer.

"To plan and to wish for are absolutely different things," he said. "I think many boxers want to fight me. But it's good to hear that Matvei is in good shape, and it's good that he wants to [fight me]."

Golovkin also noted that Kazakhstan has the best national boxing federation out of all the members of the International Boxing Association (AIBA).

"Our boxers have a chance to achieve high results because the Kazakh Boxing Federation, headed by Timur Kulibayev, is doing a lot for the development of this



sport. At the moment, I think our federation is the best in the world."

"I always said that I feel the support of Kazakhstan, of my fans, I am sincerely grateful," Golovkin replied to the joke that to watch his fights the whole country wakes up early on the weekends due to the time difference.

"I would wake up early myself to watch [fights]," he said.

Barys 9th in Conference with Two Games Left

By Galiaskar Seitghan

ASTANA – The risk that the Barys hockey club will miss its first Continental Hockey League's (KHL) Gagarin Cup playoffs is near materialising.

Since Feb. 26, the Astana team has played four games.

In the first one, Tractor Chelyabinsk was defeated 5:4 in the shootouts in the New Arena Astana. However, the following two games away were lost to HC Salavat Yulayev Ufa 4:5 and

HC Sochi 2:6. A pleasant surprise came in the match against Dynamo Riga, where the Kazakh team surprisingly won 3:2.

This was not enough to prevent the club from slipping away from the playoff zone as it is now ranked ninth, only a spot below the qualification zone. HC Neftekhimik Neftekamsk and HC Avtomobilist Yekaterinburg benefited from the Barys' difficulties to overcome the Kazakh team in the table before the end of KHL regular season.

The Astana club now readies to face HC Ak Bars Kazan and Avangard Omsk, on Feb. 16 and 18 at 4 p.m. Traditionally, those are the strongest teams in the KHL's Eastern Conference and Barys will have to play them on their home ice, while its rivals for the eighth spot will have an easier schedule.

If Barys misses the playoffs, it will be the first time ever that the Kazakhs will not be able to make it to the Gagarin Cup.

Kazakhstan Takes Fourth Place in World Bandy Championship

Staff Report

ASTANA – The Kazakhstan national bandy team lost to Sweden 0:4 in the bronze medal game at the 36th World Bandy Championship in Ulyanovsk, Russia on Feb. 7, and settled for the fourth place.

Team Russia went on to win the gold by ousting Finland 6:1 and took its tenth title in history.

A record 18 teams competed in the tournament this year from

Africa, Asia, Europe and North America: eight in Division A and 10 in Division B.

In the preliminary round in Division A, Kazakhstan held three matches and lost two. The first match was lost to the host Russia 1:9 on Feb. 1. The next day the team lost to Sweden 4:11 and on Feb. 3 managed to defeat Finland 5:4 to get its first win of the tournament.

In the playoffs, the team defeat-

ed Norway 11:3 on Feb. 4 and lost in the semis to Russia 6:16 on Feb. 6. It was the first time the national team didn't get any medals at bandy world championship since 2011. Previously the team won six bronze medals, four of them back to back from 2012 to 2016.

Tournament's top scorer was Belarusian Andrey Kabanov with 14 goals.

The Division B games will start Feb. 10.



Shymbulak Off-Piste Challenge, March 15, 2015.

CAPITAL

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Astana Snowmobile Rental, a Good Way to Enjoy Nature

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – The Kazakh capital, which is widely-known for its frosty winters, has plentiful entertainment during its six-month winter, such as skating, skiing

tack snow hills,” Issinov told The Astana Times.

To get the privilege of such alone time with nature costs from 5,000 (US\$13) to 15,000 (\$40) tenge, depending on the machine you like to ride.

sories like the gloves, hats and scarves.”

The itinerary depends on the timing according to Issinov, who added that “along the ride people can see foxes and hares, going through the woods and open meadows.”

Issinov assured that after each ride the snowmobiles are thoroughly examined to eliminate any mechanical failures, including “the brakes, ski tracks, steering.”

Also, all customers undergo quick safety instructions before the ride, Issinov said, who started his business by buying snowmobiles for himself and then by renting them out to people.

“We are located 25 minutes away from Astana’s [right] bank, in the Eco Village, along the Alash Highway, in the direction of Pavlodar,” Issinov concluded.

For booking information one can contact management at +7 775 544 9920.



To get the privilege of such alone time with nature costs from 5,000 (US\$13) to 15,000 (\$40) tenge, depending on the machine you like to ride.

and even swimming in the frozen waters. But the owner of a snowmobile business Dauren Issinov offers another adventurous type of leisure around Astana.

“The best moments [while riding snowmobiles] are when you are left with nature among white, snowy trees, forget about the city hassle and aggressively at-

“The 0.5 litre snowmobile with top speed up to 80 kilometres per hour costs 15,000 tenge per hour, or 8,000 tenge (\$21) per 30 minutes. The 0.125 litre machine, with top speed 40 kilometres per hour costs 8,000 per hour or 5,000 per 30 minutes,” Issinov explained. He added: “Make sure to have warm clothes and acces-



Astana-Shchuchinsk Highway Accidents Decrease 10 Fold

By Yerzat Sergazin

ASTANA – The General Prosecutor’s Office announced recently that modernisation of state road Astana – Shchuchinsk and the Western Europe – Western China highway has decreased road accidents and deaths.

“Up to 60 people [per year] died in road accidents on the Astana – Shchuchinsk highway before its modernisation. Now the number is 10 times less,” said Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Legal Statistics and Special Accounts of

the General Prosecutor’s Office Yergali Mabiyeu.

Mabiyeu considers that the result was achieved due to improvement of the highway.

The same situation applies to the Kazakh part of the Western Europe – Western China highway. The deputy chairman emphasised that this part of the highway has shown a great decrease in road accidents too.

The General Prosecutor’s Office works on informing of regional akimats (governor’s and mayor’s offices) about the exact places

along highways that require repair and where there is a high level of road accidents.

2015, 1.1 billion tenge (US\$2.9 million) was paid from its use to the budget. The Kazakh govern-

The Astana – Shchuchinsk highway was constructed in 2009 and is 224 kilometres long. In 2013, the highway became the first toll road in the state.

The Astana – Shchuchinsk highway was constructed in 2009 and is 224 kilometres long. In 2013, the highway became the first toll road in the state. In

ment doesn’t aim to cover the outlay for the construction of the highway, but plans to use the funds to maintain it, according to iDrive.kz.

Astana Key Maker Discusses Keys for Survival in Turbulent Times

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Small businesses can be hard to maintain during unstable economic periods, and Astana’s key makers are feeling the same pinch as the rest. The Astana Times continues its conversations with small-business operators, this time talking to key makers in the city to try and understand how the challenging times are affecting their businesses and what they need to do to stay afloat.

“Too many things can affect our type of business,” said Sergey, 38, owner of a small key-making stall at the Evraziya Mall, who preferred not to give his last name. “Mainly the competition: there are so many key makers in our city now that it’s hard to maintain the levels of income.”

Sergey, born and raised in Astana, used to make a living by making keys alone; however, in recent years, he admitted, he has had to make up for slowing business by adding a side-operation.

“A few years ago I also opened a shoe-repair in my business, to increase the revenue, but even then, it is still hard because almost everyone else did the same,” Sergey said with a disappointed smile.

People lose keys all the time, and

people also often use shoemaker’s services, and the small fees for both services allow such businesses to keep their income flowing, the key maker said. But the constantly growing competition and prices for rent keep prompting the owner to switch his profession.

“There used to be times this business was good. Looking at it now, I understand that the best thing to do is open another business. But that’s for the future; for now, I am OK. The best thing is that I don’t pay a lot for rent, as I only need about three to four square metres to work; but still, the rent prices are growing.”

Key makers could easily earn fortunes by turning to the dark side of their business, but Sergey prefers to live honestly.

“A few times I have been approached by burglars who wanted to use my skills and knowledge to make duplicates in order to rob someone’s apartment. But I refused. Making duplicates and then robbing people is a stupid idea. People remember that they made duplicates so they would point to me right away, even after a long period of time, so [there’s] no sense in doing that. ... I have three daughters, I live for them and always throw such garbage-thoughts out of my mind.”

As a key maker, Sergey has to anticipate how many and what kind of keys his customers will need and have those materials on hand. Demand has fallen, he said.

“There are expensive locks and cheap ones, car keys that now have mounted chips. I buy about 10–15 expensive key copies and about 300–400 cheap ones about once a month, but I used to buy them two to three times a month. You can

imagine now how much income my business has lost.”

To make a simple key duplicate, Sergey charges from 500 tenge (US\$1.30) to 1,500 tenge (\$4.10) on average, depending on how sophisticated the lock is. Car key duplicate prices could range from 3,000 tenge (US\$8.30) to 10,000 tenge (US\$27.50). If a car has a chip, Sergey can’t promise the keys will work. If keys don’t

work, Sergey reimburses the money.

After 27 years in business, Sergey can tell a lot about key owners just by taking a look at their keys.

“These things are easy to see from key chains. I can tell if it’s a woman – they usually have toys, something cute and pinkish – or a man, who usually has something made of leather or sports accessories like a football. I can tell if a

person is clumsy – their keys have a lot of scratches. Many things reveal the nature of the owners.”

According to Sergey, Astana’s long winters are good for key makers.

“Our best season is the winter, which is good, as it snows for six months in Astana. People often lose keys in the winter; you can drop your keys and won’t hear anything in the snow. ... [W]inter is our best season to work. But what I can say is that people will always lose keys at some point or will need to make duplicates for their relatives, children, et cetera. They will always fix shoes, they need this type of business. For us [key makers], we just need to work hard: that’s our way out of turbulent times.”



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