



Nazarbayev, Putin and Lukashenko Discuss Eurasian Economic Union Cooperation, Ukraine in Astana



(L-R) President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and President Vladimir Putin of Russia meet in the Akorda on March 20.

By Malika Rustem

ASTANA – Presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, Vladimir Putin of Russia and Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus met in Astana on March 20 to discuss prospects for closer cooperation within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as well as the situation in Ukraine.

During the meeting in Akorda presidential residence, the President of Kazakhstan said that all three countries of the EAEU are facing serious economic challenges stemming from the fall in global oil prices this year.

“It is important to develop a joint action plan to overcome the recession in our economies. That’s the primary focus of today’s meeting. We have agreed to develop trade, economic and investment cooperation.

tion. We have already instructed our governments to take measures in order to renew growth in mutual trade,” Nazarbayev said at a joint press briefing in the Akorda following the talks.

Putin noted that they have discussed all aspects of their relationships.

“Our countries share close trade and investment ties. The overall gross domestic product of the three countries is equal to 85 percent of the gross product of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). We constitute a large market with huge industrial and scientific potential. Russia is ranked first in the external trade listings of Belarus and Kazakhstan while Kazakhstan and Belarus rank third on the trade balance of the Russian Federation. Last year, Russian trade turnover with these two countries amounted

to almost \$60 billion,” Russia’s President said.

He also noted the necessity for strengthening the relations of the three countries in industry and technology, as well as in the fields of machinery, space and energy.

“The time has come to start thinking about forming a currency union,” Putin also said at the briefing, providing no further details about such a proposal. There was no immediate reaction from either Nazarbayev or Lukashenko at the briefing, while earlier Kazakh officials had noted that discussions about such a union, under the current agreements, were meant to take place no earlier than 8–10 years later.

According to the Belarusian leader, every year brings new challenges. In his opinion, the EAEU was created at the right time.

“The union is not only a declaration of intents. We have passed a lot of documents and formalised the union by signing a number of agreements. We must respond to these challenges within the framework of our union,” Lukashenko said.

“We have agreed to increase cooperation in almost all areas. We have outlined specific steps to establish additional conditions for the development of trade and economic cooperation, taking into account new realities affecting both our economies and the entire world,” added the president of Belarus.

The heads of state exchanged views on the situation in Ukraine, which has had an impact on other countries. They have also touched on the upcoming 70th anniversary of the Great Victory.

“It is clear that in the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the Great Victory, we should stay together. There are too many challenges; there have been attempts to rewrite our common history. Therefore, in the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the Great Victory, we should demonstrate political and economic unity,” the president of Belarus said.

Lukashenko also announced at the press briefing that the three presidents will next meet in Moscow on May 8 prior to the May Victory Day parade.

At the end of the meeting, Nazarbayev emphasised the importance of active and regular meetings to compare positions and discuss the future of interstate cooperation.

In turn, the two presidents expressed their gratitude to Nursultan Nazarbayev for the invitation to Astana and the opportunity to discuss these specific issues.

Three Official Candidates for Presidential Election Remain; Most Self-Nominated Candidates Drop Out

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – Abelgazy Kussainov, Turgun Syzdykov and incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbayev remain the three official candidates in Kazakhstan’s early presidential election, which has been called for April 26, and hundreds of international observers are preparing to register to take part in monitoring the contest.

Nazarbayev and Syzdykov are the only two candidates to have

been nominated by political parties, while 25 self-nominated candidates threw their hats in the ring before the March 15 cut-off, the country’s Central Election Commission reported. The three official candidates have passed the Kazakh language exam, collected the requisite 93,012 signatures supporting their campaign, provided tax information and paid the \$5,700 election deposit, the Central Election Commission confirmed.

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Incumbent President Accepts Party Nomination, Presents Policy Priorities

By Danna Buzepzhanova

ASTANA – Incumbent Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev on March 11 accepted the Nur Otan party’s nomination to be the party’s candidate in the April 26 early presidential election and laid out his policy priorities for another term.

“Thank you all for your appreciation of my work for the benefit of Kazakhstan and its people. There is no greater reward than to have this confidence of the people. I sincerely thank all those who said that today and addressed kind words to me. I declare my consent to run for the President from the Nur Otan party in the upcoming elections.

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Three Kazakhstan Citizens Die in Germanwings Crash

By Arsen Ormantayev

ASTANA – Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed on March 25 that at least three of its citizens died in the Germanwings A320 airliner crash in the French Alps on March 24.

The citizens were a family of three, including father Yerbol Imankulov, born in 1965; mother Aizhan Issengaliyeva, born in 1966; and Adil Imankulov, who was born in 1989.

Yerbol Imankulov was a director of the Tau-Ken Temir company, a subsidiary of the Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund, and managed a project to revitalize silicium production in the Karaganda region. His wife was a director at KazZinc-Aina, another mining company.

The Kazakh Foreign Ministry has expressed its deepest condolences to the relatives of the deceased and confirmed its readiness to provide them with any needed assistance in this tragic situation.

The ministry also announced that, according to German authorities, a woman by the name of Yelena Bless was also onboard the airliner and might have held Kazakhstan citizenship as well. The authorities are checking this information now, the statement from Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry said.

More than 150 people, including citizens of Germany, Spain and Turkey, died as a result of the crash of a Germanwings plane that was flying from Barcelona to Dusseldorf.

Concept of Organic Farming Planted, Growing Slowly in Kazakhstan

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – As Kazakhstan pushes to develop its agricultural sector with increased funding for farming even in times of belt-tightening, organic farming and permaculture experts are hoping the concepts maintain a foothold in the country.

Though overlooked in recent decades, the practices are part of the country’s not-too-distant past, and today, Kazakhstan is working toward exporting its own ecologically “clean” products under its own national brand, Vice Minister of Agriculture Yermek Kosherbayev said during a seminar on supporting the development of organic agriculture and institutional capacity-building in Kazakhstan in Astana on Feb. 27. However, Kosherbayev said, a lack of legislation is slowing the process down.

“Until less than 100 years ago, all Kazakh agriculture was organic,” Ethan Roland, head of the non-profit Apios Institute of Regenerative Perennial Agriculture based in Massachusetts, told The Astana Times in a Feb. 27 interview. “And it sustained itself for literally thousands of years. ... In my opinion, the current ‘development’ of Kazakh (and most other global ‘green revolution’) agriculture towards fossil-fuel-dependent industrial monoculture is highly unsustainable. This alone will drive a shift to more climatically and culturally appropriate agriculture.”

Moving away from a destructive past

A Nov. 24 roundtable discussion organised by the Astana Centre of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the ULE Coalition for a Green Economy and the Development of G-Global brought together government, business and nongovernmental organisation representatives to discuss the state’s role in supporting organic farming, including providing incentives, as well as specific agricultural technologies.

“The current methods of farming in Kazakhstan are leading to the destruction of natural vegetation that protects the land from erosion and accelerate the process of soil mineralisation, which result in drastic decline of its fertility, crops yields and harvest as a whole,” said head of the OSCE’s Astana Centre Natalia Zarudna at the roundtable, as reported by the Times of Central Asia on March 14. Organic farming practices could contribute to solving the problem, she said.

An OSCE report on the discussion said that the group noted that developing organic farming and implementing Kazakhstan’s transition to a green economy depend a great deal on the development of appropriate legislation and government regulation, as well as using domestic and international experience effectively.

Participants called for active

policies to stimulate innovation and gain experience and offered 12 concrete recommendations. These included bringing the Ministries of Agriculture and Energy together with the roundtable organisers to draft regulations based on international experience and increase awareness of the green economy transition and organic farming in Kazakhstan; creating an online exhibition of Kazakhstan’s innovative, organic products for EXPO 2017 in Astana; involving Kazakhs more deeply in the organic agriculture category of G-Global’s annual EXPO 2017 competition and passing a draft law on organic agriculture. (The draft law sets out the provision of state support for organic agriculture, including setting rules for labelling organic products from Kazakhstan.)

At a media briefing on March 12, Zhibek Azhibayeva, secretary of the Trade Committee of the Kazakhstan’s National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, said Kazakhstan’s organic products market had been estimated at more than \$500 million and that plans were in place to introduce an organic products production chain, the Times of Central Asia reported.

According to Azhibayeva, 150,000 hectares of farmland in Kostanai oblast have been certified as eco-friendly. At the Feb. 27 seminar, the Kazakhstan Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (KAZFOAM) reported that 25 farms in Almaty, Kostanai and North Kazakhstan have 296,000

hectares of certified ecologically clean fields.

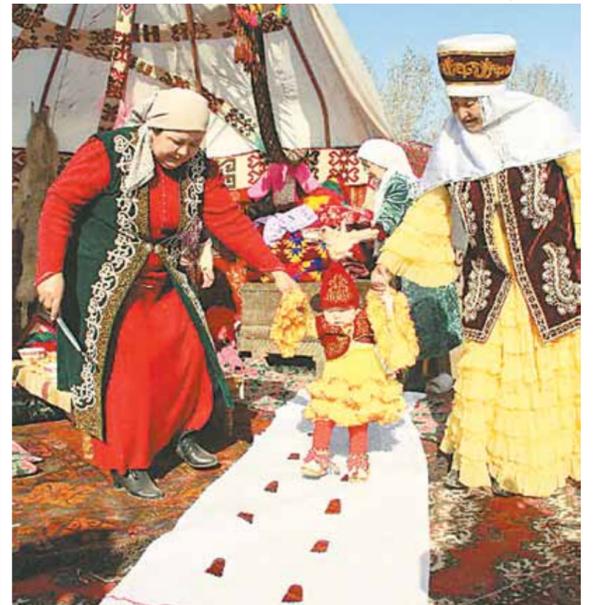
However, the country’s legacy of environmental damage can be felt today. According to the NP.kz report, the Agriculture Ministry said 21.4 million hectares of land were used for agriculture in 2014, which should be increased to 22.5 million hectares by 2018. However, according to Deputy General director of the Kazakh Research Institute of the Agroindustrial Complex and Rural Development Vladimir Grigoruk, “according to our calculations, it is possible today to grow on only 11.5 million hectares of arable land, as the rest of the area, almost half, is polluted by industrial waste, various chemicals, buried animals or radioactive waste.”

Replanting organic roots

Roland is working with the Kazakh Research Institute of Fruit Growing and Viticulture (KazNIPIV) in Almaty and the Institute for Ecological and Social Development (IESD) in Almaty. They work primarily on preserving and regenerating the biodiversity of Kazakhstan’s apple forests, but also plan to branch out into other areas of biodiverse farming. “This work is just beginning,” Roland told The Astana Times. “Some of my colleagues ... have been working on different aspects of this – e.g. IESD promoting sound agricultural practices within the matrix of the existing biodiverse apple forests.”

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Nation Celebrates Nauryz



The country celebrated Nauryz, the traditional spring new year holiday, from March 21-25. See story on B1.

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NATION

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Three Official Candidates for Presidential Election Remain; Most Self-Nominated Candidates Drop Out

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Syzdykov, a veteran of the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan with a decades-long civil service career, was nominated by his party in early March. Nazarbayev was nominated unanimously by the ruling Nur Otan party on March 11. Kussainov, who has a 35-year career in local and central government positions, including serving in the Kazakh Senate, in two ministries and as akim (governor) of Karaganda, is the only self-nominated candidate announced by the CEC as having successfully completed the full election nomination process.

"Elections are always a possibility to raise important issues of the society and to draw attention to the vital problems of every human life like the environmental issues and security," Tengrinews.kz quoted Kussainov as saying on March 13. "My colossal work and life experi-

ence have convinced me that we are underestimating these problems. Therefore, my goal in this election is to convey these questions of our existence to our society."

Mels Yeleussizov, head of the Tabigat Ecological Union, who has dropped out of the race, said he'd joined to shine a light on ecological problems within the country, which he said were more important than the government's anti-crisis programme. Yeleussizov also ran in 2011, for the same reason, but is known to have voted for Nazarbayev. Six self-nominated candidates declined to take the language exam, ending their candidacies. The nomination process may be ongoing for some other self-nominated candidates; most, however, have either declined to take the language exam or otherwise dropped out of the race.

The nominees had until March 25 to collect the required more than 90,000 signatures in at least nine

out of 14 regions of Kazakhstan as well as the two largest cities with the special status, Astana and Almaty.

Nazarbayev will be promoting his Nurly Zhol economic stimulus package, which emphasises transport infrastructure development, and his Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, which aims to raise Kazakhstan to join the world's 30 most developed countries by 2050 and contains programmes to promote the development of key economic sectors, including small business, agriculture and industry. At the party congress during which he was nominated, he laid out five institutional reforms he recommended for the nation: forming a modern, professional and autonomous state apparatus; emphasising the rule of law, particularly laws that protect business and entrepreneurial activity; diversifying the economy and developing industry; supporting religious and ethnic harmony and a Kazakhstan identity

based on citizenship; and encouraging transparency and accountability by the state.

Last week, both the Ak Zhol Democratic Party and the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan (PPK) officially threw their support behind Nazarbayev, who has also received support from several of his country's neighbours, including President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

As of March 10, about 100 members of foreign media had been accredited to observe the election, the CEC announced. Thirteen foreign election observers had been accredited by the CEC by March 20, Kazakh TV reported, including observers from Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Georgia, Israel and the Netherlands, with accreditation remaining open until April 20. About 430 mission representatives from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will monitor the campaign, as well about the same number from the

Commonwealth of Independent States.

Chairman of the CEC Kuandyk Turgankulov met with the head of the Election Observation Mission (EOM) from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Cornelia Jonker on March 24, saying his organisation was open to cooperating with international observers and welcomed their engagement. Jonker, who has led observation missions to Kyrgyzstan and Serbia, was appointed to lead the observation mission in Kazakhstan last week.

Candidates for president of Kazakhstan must be Kazakhstan citizens by birth, no younger than 40, fluent in Kazakh language and have lived in the country for 15 years at the time of their candidacy. This presidential election campaign will end on April 24, followed by a so-called "day of silence" when no campaigning is allowed and the actual vote on April 26.

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev made a working visit to the Atyrau region March 19 where he saw the work of industrial and agricultural enterprises, met with the workforce and held a meeting on implementing President Nursultan Nazarbayev's instructions from the Feb. 11 enlarged government session. At the meeting in the Atyrau refinery, the discussion centred on the progress of executing the Nurly Zhol programme and the previously-signed memoranda on job preservation, production stabilisation, employment and development of local content. Addressing the participants, Saparbayev stressed that "cooperation initiatives provided in the memoranda will allow us to neutralise today's economic challenges." He expressed confidence that the joint efforts of the government, business and trade unions will make it possible to prevent the decline of employment and provide significant support to businesses in difficult times. During the trip, Saparbayev also became acquainted with the development of the region's agro-industrial complex and visited the Almalyk Kus poultry farm, which has an annual capacity of 30 million eggs. Its commissioning at the end of 2014 significantly reduced the region's demand for imported products.

Kazakh medical staff willing to receive the higher, first or second category in 2015 will need to demonstrate their emergency skills during the knowledge evaluation process, according to the Ministry of Health and Social Development. In order to receive the first and second category, doctors must demonstrate first aid skills in anaphylactic shock, acute coronary syndrome, sudden cardiac arrest and the ability to carry out basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation and assist with a foreign body in the upper respiratory tract. In order to receive the higher category, doctors with therapeutic, surgical, gynaecological, dental and other specialties must be able to interpret laboratory and instrumental indicators using clinical tasks and have the skills of the first and second category doctors. The ministry is continuing its work on evaluating the knowledge and practical skills for doctors, except managers. According to the results of the evaluation, examination materials for doctors wishing to raise their qualification category were reconsidered and improved in the second half of 2014. Claimants applying for the higher, first and second categories were evaluated by independent experts and medical doctors with higher-category status, science degrees and special education. The evaluation of doctors' practical skills will contribute to improving the quality of medical aid.

"The Kazakhstan 2050 national movement has been collecting applications to employ youth within the Nurly Zhol programme and plans to involve about 5,000 people," movement Board Member Mukhtar Mankeyev said at a March 16 Central Communication Services (CCS) media briefing. "We plan to cover approximately 5,000 young people. Our goal is to throw together an employer and a young man who wants to work and in the future, to monitor how it works," said Mankeyev. He added that more than a thousand applications have been received from residents in rural areas. "We have initiated a project to promote the employment of rural youth at the facilities within the framework of the Nurly Zhol programme. There were preliminary talks with the government, in particular with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health and Social Development," he said. Applications were accepted in Kazpost offices until March 26, then the list of candidates was considered by employment agencies. By March 30, the final list of young people who will work on the Nurly Zhol programme will be formed.

Central Election Commission Begins Cooperation With OSCE Observers

By Galiaskar Seitghan

ASTANA – Past positive cooperation between Kazakhstan's electoral authority and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers was recalled March 24 as Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) Kuandyk Turgankulov met with the head of the Election Observation Mission (EOM) from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Cornelia Jonker.

"We are open to cooperating with international observers and consider their engagement a [welcome] contribution to securing transparency in the forthcoming election that raises [the level of] trust from all [those involved] in the election process," said Turgankulov at the meeting.

According to a CEC press release, senior members of CEC and the EOM were also in attendance. Turgankulov briefed representatives from the latter on the CEC's preparations to hold the early presidential election set for April 26 and key stages in the electoral campaign.

Jonker thanked the Kazakh side for inviting the OSCE to observe the election and expressed hope that EOM experts would establish close cooperation with the CEC staff. "We look forward to positive and fruitful cooperation," Jonker, who led several observation missions in the past to countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Serbia, said.

"There is an experience and practice of such an interaction," agreed Turgankulov.

The CEC assured the OSCE experts that the government and electoral authorities had a shared goodwill to ensure the campaign proceeds in strict compliance with

electoral law and high international standards.

Turgankulov said he looked forward to the EOM delivering an "honest and objective" observation of the election.

"I believe [in this regard] the interests of the mission, CEC and all those involved in the electoral process coincide," he added.

Jonker, 48, was appointed last week to monitor the Kazakh election. According to the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), she studied speech therapy and worked as a speech therapist in the management of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service, combined with engagements in local and regional politics.

From 2004 to June 2010, Jonker was a member of the Dutch Parliament, chairing the committee on social affairs. Concurrently, she became a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), where she chaired the committee on migration, refugees and population. She has extensive election experience as a member of PACE observer committees and headed the PACE committee for the 2009 Albanian elections.

Jonker was the head of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission to Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and 2011 and the OSCE/ODIHR limited election observation mission to Serbia in 2012.

OSCE/ODIHR deployed its mission following an official invitation from Kazakhstan to observe the upcoming election, based on the findings and recommendations of the needs assessment mission that visited the country March 3–6. Since 1999 election observation missions have been deployed for Kazakhstan's seven previous presidential and parliamentary elections.

Incumbent President Accepts Party Nomination, Presents Policy Priorities

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I urge you, my fellows, Nur Otan party members and Kazakhstan's people, to unite again and win! Our joint moral power and high purpose is Mangelik El – Eternal Motherland! It will fill our development in the 21st century with the energy of progress," Nazarbayev said. "Building on our successes, we must move forward and that is why I am addressing you here today."

Nazarbayev was nominated unanimously by the Nur Otan party's 1,200 congress delegates.

"We must, as a party, nominate Nursultan Nazarbayev and receive his consent. He is the only worthy candidate, and I hereby put forward his candidacy," prominent academician and Professor Kenzhegali Sagadiyev announced at the congress.

In accepting the nomination, Nazarbayev noted the achievements of independent Kazakhstan and presented new approaches and policies, including those in the new Nurly Zhol economic policy, which is aimed at addressing global challenges.

"Firstly, avoid negative impacts from external factors on state-building. Secondly, maintain the momentum of development. Third, provide the conditions for further development. Fourth, continue advancing toward joining the 30 [most-developed] countries in the world," he said.

Amid economic crises, falling oil prices and geopolitical instability, Nazarbayev stressed the need for non-standard and strong responses to global challenges to

Kazakhstan statehood, putting forward institutional reforms in five key areas: establishing a modern, professional and autonomous state apparatus; solidifying the rule of law; achieving industrialisation and economic growth based on diversification; unifying as a single nation for the future; and functioning as a transparent and accountable government.

He underlined that these reforms would strengthen the state and facilitate its entry into the 30 most-developed countries in the world.

"The five institutional reforms are the five steps, which the country should take in that order. Only in this case, will our reforms be effective and will society and the state be united and stable. All successful states have gone through this path," Nazarbayev said.

"It is a way to implement the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy. Each of the five institutional reforms is a huge challenge and [important] for the country. The success of these reforms can be achieved only with the firm will of the government and the people. The proposed measures will radically change the system of social relations. To carry them out, I propose to establish a National Commission on Modernisation under the President. It will coordinate the implementation of the whole set of reforms. Thus, our central task in the forthcoming years is to start and gradually implement these five institutional reforms," he added.

Elaborating on the reforms, he underlined the significance of overhauling the civil service,

noting that it should be "professional and autonomous" and based on a career model rather than the current positional one. Nazarbayev also highlighted the need to toughen requirements for judges and increase the responsibility of police officers toward the people as it would create conditions for implementing economic reforms to establish a solid middle class.

"The middle class should be considered as the basis of the Kazakhstan nation and the source forming a professional state apparatus. It is the driving force, the most interested in the rule of law, accountability to the people and the country's stability. Therefore, it is a broad middle class that is the core of the formation of national identity," he said.

Addressing industrialisation, Nazarbayev underlined existing distortions in the system of state support for agriculture and proposed implementing approximately 10 large-scale projects involving multinational companies in the processing industry.

Other transformations will affect simplification of the tariff policy in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, diversification of the economy, development of small- and medium-sized businesses in the service sector and introducing legislation of the special status of Almaty as a regional and international finance centre.

The President also touched upon intercultural and inter-ethnic accord, a highly relevant issue for the country, which includes more than 130 nationalities.

Nur Otan Party Urges Country to Clarify Laws on Charity, Philanthropy

By Kseniya Voronina

ASTANA – A 2014 ranking by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) placed Kazakhstan 101st out of 135 countries on the World Giving Index. As a result, participants at a recent meeting concluded the need for the nation to develop and adopt a draft law on charity, according to the Nur Otan party press service.

"Of course society needs charity, because in this growing global economic crisis it is especially important to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups of the population. The development of charity contributes to better protection of vulnerable groups of the population and the develop-

ment of creativity, culture and sport. Charity creates social responsibility of businesses and citizens, promotes consolidation and humanisation of the society and ultimately leads to an increase in the quality of human capital and the development of the country. Therefore, the law on charity is urgent and important," stated the press release.

Experts pointed out that the practice of philanthropy in Kazakhstan is underdeveloped compared to other countries. Only 0.5 percent of citizens are constantly engaged in charity, with the volume of donations, according to various estimates, ranging from 300 to 400 million tenge (US\$1.6-\$2.2 million). By comparison, in the U.S. about 90 percent of

the population is engaged in charitable giving, with 2 percent of the nation's annual gross domestic product earmarked for charity.

The draft involves a number of steps to create conditions in Kazakhstan to activate this type of material assistance. The draft is still under consideration and proposals to improve it were discussed at the meeting.

The Nur Otan Institute for Public Policy suggested strengthening the transparency and accountability provisions of the draft, including eliminating the phrase "opacity and secrecy of charity organisations, as well as any corruption and corruption risks."

The proposal also included the compulsory indication of sources of received funds; that is, funds received

from state bodies, departments and agencies, as well as companies with state participation, which would increase the effectiveness of spending control and use of funds allocated from the state budget. Another important point should be a requirement for effective use of funds spent by charity organisations.

"The law should be primarily aimed not at the administration, but at the development of charity. As a motivating factor it can be used for tax incentives, which is widespread in world practice," said Aruzhan Sain, head of the Dobrovolnoye Obschestvo Miloserdie (Mercy Voluntary Society) public fund.

She also stressed that the document considered will not change the situa-

tion in the country. "Since 2006 we have been working in this direction and I must say that by and large, the draft law in this form will not change anything in charity. Everything stated in the draft law already exists in practice, regulated by the tax code, Ministry of Justice, et cetera. In regard to the promotion of charitable activity by awards, it seems to me that tax bonuses would be much more attractive for a business," said Sain.

According to Nikolai Kuzmin, a member of the Nur Otan faction in the Mazhilis (lower chamber of Parliament), the idea of a law on charity should be "the need for clear legal criteria to encourage people in their endeavours, rather than indulging them in their dependency." The MP stressed that implementing the draft law would not require additional financial costs from the state budget.

A large number of substantive comments and suggestions provided during the discussion will be analysed and taken into account to further elaborate the draft law.

EURASIA&WORLD

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EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

"The Kazakh-Austrian Business Council should consist of two divisions, an expert analytical centre and an investments promotion department," Kazakhstan Co-Chair Meiram Pshembayev said at a March 16 meeting of the council's board. "We believe that there should be two divisions, an expert analytical centre and an investments promotion department. Attention needs to be paid to entrepreneurs interested in finding local and foreign partners," he said. The co-chair also noted that any Kazakh or Austrian business or organisation may join the council. Pshembayev noted the importance of establishing a visa-free regime between the two countries.

"The volume of gas transported through the Kazakhstan-China pipeline will be increased to 55 billion tenge (US\$295.67 million) worth," Kazakh Vice Minister of Energy Magzum Mirzagaliyev said at a March 19 media briefing at the Central Communication Services (CCS). "Last year, 30 billion cubic metres of gas was transported through the Kazakhstan-China pipeline. But several years ago, there was no pipeline at all. Construction of the third branch of the Kazakhstan-China pipeline has finished, which allows for 55 billion cubic metres of gas to be transported," Mirzagaliyev said. He also reminded that logistics, including gas transportation projects, are given great attention under the Nurlu Zhol programme, Kazakhstan's new economic policy.

On March 20, Vice President of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy (KTZ) Express Sergei Anashkin made a statement that KTZ is currently considering building or leasing external logistics terminals. According to Anashkin, the company is considering the possibility of renting sea port terminals in Yantien and dry ports in Xi'an and Zhengzhou. Cargo capacity would be up to 2 million tonnes per year. In addition, Anashkin noted that the Kazakhstan-China terminal in the port of Lianyungang and the construction or lease of logistics terminals are in the planning stages. Anashkin added that now they are evaluating the location of the terminal and the possible inclusion of Baltic ports. They carry a cargo handling capacity of up to 1.7 million tonnes per year.

On March 17, the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan announced that the Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Dmitry Mezentshev will head the SCO observer mission during the early presidential elections in Kazakhstan. According to the Foreign Ministry, a meeting of the SCO National Coordinators was held in Beijing, at which representatives planned SCO observer activities. The SCO includes Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In addition, the SCO granted observer status to Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The early presidential elections are scheduled for April 26.

"The Forgotten of Karaganda" ("Los Olvidados de Karaganda") received gold in the Documentary & Short International Movie Competition in Jakarta, Indonesia in early March. The film, which won Best Documentary in 2014 at the California Documentary Film Competition, is a 50-minute documentary about the fate of Spanish members of the Republican and Blue Division movements, who opposed each other during the Spanish Civil War but during World War II ended up in the same prison camp in Kazakhstan. The film shows the ideological enemies becoming allies and forgetting their differences for the sake of personal and collective survival. The film uses eyewitness accounts and describes the circumstances that led to the incarceration of the Spanish prisoners in KarLag (part of the infamous Gulag system of Stalin's so-called labour correction camps), whose stories remained unknown to most Spaniards until now.

Agreement Seeks to Improve Diplomatic Staff Training



(L-R) Bolatbek Abdrasilov, Erlan Idrissov and Alikhan Baimenov at the signing of a new agreement on diplomatic staff training in Astana on March 19.

By Malika Rustem

ASTANA – Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Regional Hub of Civil Service Alikhan Baimenov and Rector of the Academy of Public Administration Bolatbek Abdrasilov signed an agreement on March 19 to ensure the training of foreign diplomats at Kazakhstan's academies.

During the signing ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Idrissov noted that this agreement provides a foundation for joint scientific, educational and research work, which will enhance the image of Kazakhstan as a regional leader in diplomatic staff training.

"The uniqueness and novelty of this agreement lies in the fact that Kazakhstan will start to facilitate developing a national staff from other countries in the region. According to our agreement with Tajikistan, the Institute of Diplomacy of the Academy of Public Administration will start training two Tajik diplomats. This demonstrates the proactive role of Kazakhstan in the region," the minister said.

Baimenov noted that one of the goals of the Regional Hub of the civil service is to improve the region's human resources capacity.

"Education of Tajik diplomats in Kazakhstan's academy shows the

growing role of Kazakh diplomacy and interest in the work of the Regional Hub from our neighbours. We can say that the hub is launching a new phase of its development in the training of national staff in the region," said Baimenov, noting that 30 countries and five international organisations are involved in the work of hub today.

"The signing of this document is a landmark event, which opens up the possibility for development of a new project in the work of the academy. I think that the level of our education and scientific projects do attract attention from neighbouring countries. We are ready to continue our cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Regional Hub," concluded Abdrasilov.

As main priorities, they have determined several things. Among those of particular importance are scholarships for government officials in the Institute of Diplomacy, development and introduction of new methods of training in foreign policy, exchange of informational and analytical materials, as well as training programmes and consultations to improve diplomatic staff training, promotion of collaborative research projects, exchange of experts and teaching staff, as well as participation in conferences, seminars and roundtables.

Historical Connections, Shared Challenges Bind Kazakhstan, Israel, Says Visiting Diplomat

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – Kazakhstan and Israel are united by some common roots and common challenges, Deputy Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry Zvi Rav-Ner said during his March 10 – 11 visit to Astana, but it is time for them to create more concrete connections.

In town to meet with his counterparts here, Rav-Ner also addressed Kazakhstan's Institute of Diplomacy, touching on some issues that connect the two countries. He had two fundamental pieces of advice for the diplomatic hopefuls – focus on your people, and work multilaterally. "[T]hey really, as diplomats, have to think and care about the good of their country," the deputy director general, who heads the Eurasia Division of Israel's Foreign Ministry, said in an interview in Astana on March 11. "Because leaders change, parliaments change, but the country doesn't and the people don't. ... And the country is the people."

The other message was multilateralism – so many issues have become regional and international these days, and much diplomatic work is now being done through the United Nations, regional associations and special agencies, Rav-Ner said. Though the UN isn't perfect, it is still an invaluable institution, he said. "Therefore – I wasn't thinking about it, but when I met them, they were striving, upcoming new graduates of this country ... I felt that I had to tell them that diplomacy is not just a bilateral business. Growingly, it is a matter of multilateralism."

Kazakhstan is acting on the real-

ity of regional and global integration, finding its place in the world through initiating the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building in Asia (CICA) – which, Rav-Ner notes, Israel was among the first to support – the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which Israel's chief rabbis are consistently involved in, and other platforms.

The congress of religious leaders is useful, Rav-Ner said. "First of all, we don't have many forums of this sort. ... [H]ow many conferences of this kind do we have, where we have Christians, Jews and Muslims, under the auspices, of course, of a Muslim country? Not many."

"For us, participation in CICA and these forums provides an opportunity to communicate informally with representatives of countries with whom we don't have diplomatic relations; for instance, some Arab countries and others, like Pakistan, like Afghanistan. These are rare opportunities to communicate informally and we'd like to thank Kazakhstan for creating these opportunities for us," said Eurasia Department Counsellor Michael Brodsky in the same interview.

The bilateral relationship with Kazakhstan is also very important to Israel, Rav-Ner said.

"Especially because we are having a conflict with part of the Arab-Muslim world in our area, we do appreciate very much Kazakhstan, as well as other countries of this nature in this region. They are very important to us, because here we have relations with Muslim countries that are a bit different – if not to say completely different – from what we are used to in our region,"

EXPO 2017 Opens New Horizons for Cooperation with South Korea, Japan

By Murager Sauranbayev

TOKYO – To date, 20 countries have confirmed their participation in EXPO 2017, among them South Korea and Japan, who have started to prepare their pavilions, it was announced during the visit of a Kazakh delegation headed by EXPO 2017 Commissioner and First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Rapol Zhoshybayev to South Korea and Japan on March 20 – 24.

In Seoul, talks were held with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Korea Cho Tae-yul and CEO of the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) Byun Chu-seok. The meeting at the South Korean Foreign Office demonstrated the two sides' overlapping positions on many current international issues, as well as their aligned views on the prospects of strengthening bilateral cooperation. Zhoshybayev thanked South Korea for its support of Kazakhstan's candidature for a nonpermanent seat on the UN Security Council. He also briefed his interlocutor on preparations for EXPO 2017 and officially invited South Korea to take part in the exposition with a letter of invitation from President Nursultan Nazarbayev to President of Korea Park Geun-hye.

During the talks with the KTO, Zhoshybayev briefed the organisation on steps taken to develop tourism in Kazakhstan as EXPO 2017 approaches and invited South Korea to more actively utilise Kazakhstan's tourism potential, especially in light of the visa-free regime introduced between the two countries last year. A memorandum of understanding between the EXPO 2017 National Company and the KTO was signed following the meeting outlining the prospective areas of cooperation.

Kazakhstan's delegation also visited the Samsung company's high-tech exposition complex, D-



Rapol Zhoshybayev (l) and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Takashi Uto

Light, which houses some of the company's most advanced new technological solutions, including those dealing with alternative and renewable sources of energy.

In Tokyo, the EXPO 2017 commissioner met with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Takashi Uto, Vice Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan Norihiko Ishiguro, President of the Japan Association of Travel Agencies (JATA) Tatsuro Nakamura and Executive Vice-President of the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) Soichi Yoshimura.

During negotiations at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the parties noted the high level of political, trade, economic and investment cooperation between their two countries. They also stressed the importance of arranging the official visit of Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe to Astana in 2015, which is seen as a sign of a growing bilateral partnership.

Zhoshybayev also handed his Japanese colleague an official message from President Nazarbayev to Prime Minister Abe concerning Kazakhstan's bid for the UN Security Council seat.

With Vice Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan Norihiko Ishiguro, who also co-chairs the Joint Kazakh-Japanese Commission on Economic Cooperation for the State and Private Sectors, Zhoshybayev discussed prepara-

tions for the sixth meeting of the Kazakh-Japanese Commission in Tokyo in 2015 and the interaction of specialised government agencies on attracting corporate participants to EXPO 2017, especially those working in energy, machinery and high technologies. Zhoshybayev underlined that the exposition would be a platform for presenting Kazakhstan's scientific potential in renewable energy and would also provide a new incentive for the promotion of multilateral cooperation in this sphere.

Ishiguro announced that Japan had officially decided to take part in EXPO 2017. Japanese corporations including Toyota, Mitsubishi and others have already expressed their readiness to participate in the expo in Astana.

In the course of the conversation with the president of the JATA, the parties agreed to more actively promote Kazakhstan as a tourism destination, including its historical monuments and cultural heritage along the ancient Silk Road.

Nakamura told Zhoshybayev that Kazakhstan was included among the countries most recommended to Japanese tourists to visit and also expressed the hope that the introduction of a visa-free regime for citizens of Japan would significantly increase the flow of the Japanese tourists to Kazakhstan.

Ahead of the expo commissioner's visit, a special presentation of videos about Kazakhstan and the upcoming EXPO 2017 was organised by the Kazakh Embassy in Japan at two terminals in Tokyo's Haneda International Airport.

The Kazakh Foreign Ministry's press service reports that in 2015, the organising committee of EXPO 2017 is planning to secure confirmations of participation in the international specialised exhibition in Astana from up to 60 foreign countries and international organisations.

ongoing, expanded collaboration: with Kazakhstan in the process of creating its official development agency, Israel has offered the use of the farm as a KazAID training centre for agriculture specialists from across Central Asia, Brodsky said. "Both countries would benefit from this and also other countries in the region would benefit from it." Israel has also offered to share its development aid experience, he said.

In water, another challenge for both countries, Israel and Kazakhstan signed an agreement last August on cooperating in water management and upgrading the water system in Kazakhstan. "It still remains to be seen how this agreement will be implemented, but in the meantime there is an agreement in place on cooperation on a very large scale in Kazakhstan," Brodsky said.

Kazakhstan and Central Asia, while not Israel's top priority, are important to the country, historically, emotionally and politically, Rav-Ner said. And while Israel and Kazakhstan are still not connected by a direct flight – which the officials would like to see changed – other Central Asian and Caucasian countries are. "Therefore, we have great interest in these countries. They are friendly countries, politically, economically and otherwise. Even though, as I admitted, we have not done enough – in this respect, it also takes two to tango: they also can do more ... I urge them to do more and we urge ourselves to do more. This is also our task – to convince our people to come and invest, to do business here."

A key part of the relationship is energy – Israel buys more than \$1 billion worth of Kazakhstan's oil every year, Brodsky said. But as Kazakhstan diversifies its economy, there are other areas ripe for cooperation, particularly in advanced technologies.

So far, Brodsky said, the two main fields with the greatest potential for cooperation are agriculture and health. In the next few days, he pointed out, a contingent of hospital directors will travel to Israel for a seminar. In May, Ushkonr farm, a project using Israel's drip irrigation technology, will open near Almaty.

The farm may be a source of

ECONOMY

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Gasification in Kazakhstan Expected to Grow Significantly, Says Energy Official

By Kenes Dandybayev

ASTANA – Kazakhstan Minister of Energy Vladimir Shkolnik recently said that there are 1,150 gasified localities in Kazakhstan and that by 2030, more than 1,600 will come online. Gas consumption is expected to grow from 10.9 billion cubic metres in 2013 to 18 billion cubic metres in 2030. This includes projects being carried out under the State Programme of Accelerated Industrial and Innovative Development (SPAIID).

In this interview, Vice Minister of Energy Magzum Mirzagaliyev further elaborated, discussing the ministry's gasification aims.

Kazakhstan is known to be rich in mineral resources, especially oil. What about gas?

Our country has abundant gas reserves. Gas is one of the fastest growing fuels in the domestic economy: gas extraction is growing, as is the gas pipeline network and refining infrastructure.

In 2014, 43.2 billion cubic metres of gas was produced in Kazakhstan; that is over five times greater than in 1991 and more than twice as much (115.5 percent) as four years ago. Kazakhstan's geological resources (taking into account the new discoveries on the Caspian shelf) exceed 7.6 trillion cubic metres and recoverable reserves are more than 3.9 trillion cubic metres.

We are pursuing current and revised strategic objectives through Kazakhstan's new economic poli-



Magzum Mirzagaliyev

cy, the Nurlu Zhol programme and the second five-years of industrial development programme. For example, plans to develop the sector include increased gasification around the country. A general gasification scheme for 2015–2030 has been approved. The policy defines economically viable directions for a reliable gas supply to consumers. Already, much work has been accomplished in this area. Regional administrations, together with the Ministry of Energy, have developed regional gasification schemes. Gas consumption volumes have been estimated. Kazakhstan's General Gasification Scheme is based on the findings, as was a development roadmap for the country's gas industry until 2030.

You have discussed the preparatory stage. But how will it be implemented in actuality? Heating houses with natural gas is economically more attractive than with coal and wood for example.

How quickly will the programme move?

Most of our work until 2030 will focus on domestic gasification aimed at boosting the economy. In terms of figures, from 2006 to the present, more than 130 provincial gasification projects are being implemented by the state. Because of this, over the past eight years, the number of gasified communities grew from 728 to 1,150. Coverage of the population has increased from 5 million to 7 million. Currently, Kazakhstan's western and southern regions are fully gasified as well as Almaty, covering 10 of the country's 16 regions. Implementation of the General Gasification Scheme will bring the number of gasified citizens up to 12 million. By 2030, 13 regions will be covered by this scheme. About 656 billion tenge (US\$3.53 billion) in investments will be needed to complete the project.

Calculations were made to prioritise each region's importance. Funding can be drawn from three sources: the state budget, the national operator and other sources (such as the public-private enterprise).

Gasification should be a driver of economic growth, the basis for the country's industrialisation and enhance the ecological and social and economic welfare of the country.

According to commodity gas consumption forecasts for 2030, the largest share of consumption will be in the industrial businesses and fuel-energy complex (31 and 40 percent, respectively), including those that are a part of the SPAIID.

What about gas we use in our homes? Is this a special gas? Is there a difference between the gas produced in the fields and what comes out of our stoves?

There certainly is. Gas from the field is a mixture of various gases with impurities, including harmful ones, such as sulphur. Already treated gas is what comes out of our stoves. It is odorised, meaning that it is given a characteristic smell in order to help people detect leaks.

It was mentioned that liquefied gas could be an alternative to petrol. Does increasing the number of petrol stations carrying this fuel make sense?

Liquefied petroleum gas as a motor fuel is much cheaper than traditional fuel and could be a viable alternative to traditional types, but in Kazakhstan, it is not so widely used because of a lack of infrastructure. There are a little more than 500 gas stations in the country, which is not enough.

To reduce import dependence, the Energy Ministry entered into a memorandum of understanding with KazMunayGas Processing and Marketing as well as Helios on cooperation on the use of gas as a motor fuel.

Besides, since 2010, KazTransGas has been working to get more vehicles on compressed natural gas. From 2010–2014, five gas filling stations were built in Almaty. Another three stations in Shymkent, Aktobe and Kyzylorda are being built.

A comprehensive action plan

was approved by the Energy Ministry to support the development of environmentally friendly types of transport in Almaty and a task team is working out legislative amendments on the transition to a green economy.

It has been said in the media and cited by experts that if there were rapid growth in demand for gas-based motor fuels, Kazakhstan would soon run short. Are these fears grounded?

Motor gas fuel in Kazakhstan has been used for more than 10 years, but unfortunately, consumers have been slow to adopt it. If we talk about volume, as of the end of last year, nearly 2.5 million tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas was produced. The slated production volume for this year is 2.547 million tonnes. Consumption is projected at about 500,000 tonnes. Thus, we have a surplus of liquefied petroleum gas in the internal market, i.e. five times more of it is produced than consumed. These experts you speak of should know about this.

What does the future of Kazakhstan's gas industry look like?

All the facts I have discussed speak for themselves. The gas industry is dynamically and systematically moving into the future.

The launch of the third Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline is expected to take place this year; also, the linear part of the main gas pipeline, the Beineu-Bozoi, which will provide access to over 300 populated communities in the Kyzylorda and South Kazakhstan regions and transport gas from the western to southern regions will be launched. Thus, domestic energy development prospects, especially those concerning gas, are very optimistic.

ECONOMY NEWS IN BRIEF

"Transport currently makes up 15-16 percent of Kazakhstan's GDP (gross domestic product) and this number will only increase," member of the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) Serikbai Nurgissayev said at a March 17 Central Communications Service (CCS) briefing. "Developed transit sectors generally constitute 16-20 percent of a nation's GDP; currently in Kazakhstan, this indicator is at 15-16 percent. Subsoil development is currently 40-45 percent of the country's GDP. In the future, the share of the transport sector in GDP will grow," Nurgissayev said. He also noted that through the development of international and interregional roads in Kazakhstan, manufacturers in China, Iran, Russia, Europe and the rest of Asia will become interested in moving goods through Kazakhstan.

The National Bank of Kazakhstan held an interdepartmental working group meeting on March 20 on developing a national mortgage refinancing programme. Basic refinancing conditions and a refinancing mechanism were defined. The National Bank made it clear that under the refinancing programme, mortgages issued between 2004 and 2009 will see rate decreases. Deputy Head of the National Bank Kuat Kozhakhmetov explained that the refinancing plan will be hallmarked by the issuance of new loans with low interest rates as well as with changes to loan validity dates.

A meeting concerning development in the cities of Zhezkazgan and Satpayev and the Ulytau district of the Karaganda region for 2012–2020 was held in the House of Government on March 18 chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev. The complex plan costs 351.50 billion tenge (US\$1.88 billion) of which, 33.4 billion (US\$179.58 million) has already been spent. The plan includes 88 projects. Of that number, 13 were implemented between 2012 and 2014. Mining for igneous rocks (building stone) has begun in the Nikolskiy Ulytau District. Zhezkazgan Hospital and the City Polyclinic of Satpayev, both state-owned enterprises, were provided with medical equipment. In 2015, it is expected that 17 projects will begin. Following the meeting, Sagintayev instructed local and executive bodies to implement the plan in a timely manner. The meeting was attended by representatives of central state bodies, various Karaganda executive offices and Kazakhmys Corporation which operates in the localities.

"It has been suggested that tax deductions for business-philanthropists increase from 3 to 10 percent," Deputy Chairman of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs (NCE) Nurzhan Altayev said at a March 16 meeting of the Committee for the Social Sphere and Social Partnership of the Atameken NCE. "In the draft law on charitable work, we propose tax incentives and that the amount that can be deducted from taxes for charitable giving be increased from 3 to 10 percent," Altayev said. As NCE representatives, we plan to introduce appropriate changes to the law "On Charity, Sponsorship and Patronage." The NCE also made a proposal to establish an endowment fund. These funds are established by stakeholders to obtain investments used to finance beneficiaries. Non-profit organisations engaged in educational, scientific, administrative, social, cultural or other societally beneficial functions are eligible to become beneficiaries of the fund.

The Nurlu Zhol economic stimulus programme will support the construction of 73 new schools in Kazakhstan between 2015 – 2017, allocating 61.9 billion tenge (US\$332.77 million) for the project from the country's National Fund, Bnews.kz reports. The allocation will increase gradually year by year, according to a Ministry of Education statement presented at a Central Communications Service briefing. Fifty-seven schools will be built to eliminate the need for three-shift school days; 16 will replace dilapidated or otherwise undesirable buildings. The Nurlu Zhol programme focuses on infrastructure and transit infrastructure development.

Concept of Organic Farming Planted, Growing Slowly in Kazakhstan

Continued from Page A1

Going forward, we intend to offer workshops on the benefits of biodiverse farming and explore research projects." He expects to find a receptive audience. His Kazakh colleagues are also enthusiastic about developing organic agriculture, Roland said, especially as its products will likely demand higher prices in local and export markets.

Draft law on organic farming awaits vote; private initiatives work to support organic development

Raul Karychev, laboratory chief at KazNIPiV, told The Astana Times on March 10 that his institute is studying and implementing elements of organic fruit growing, including identifying varieties most adapted to local conditions and which don't need chemical treatments and studying adaptive orchard design and crown formation systems, drip irrigation, high-technology farming, organic fertiliser and more.

With international partners including the Apios Institute, the institute has established wild fruit ecosystems in the Zaili Alatau region, Karychev said. He also noted that the Horticulture Master Plan of the Agribusiness 2020 Programme provides for a phased increase in orchard areas in Kazakhstan. "The Kazakh government has embarked on the green economy, so the area of organic orchards and the demand for environmentally friendly products will only grow," he said.

From wild apples to sustainable traditions

"The wild apple forests of Kazakhstan are part of one of the world's biodiversity hot spots – it is one of the centres of origins of many fruits, and could potentially hold the keys to a sustainable agriculture of the future," Roland says. But beyond apples, Kazakhstan also has an important agricultural tradition, and one which is beginning to be recognised and supported.

"Kazakh food production has a fascinating and beautiful history, with two interwoven threads of livestock-focused semi-nomadism and advanced mountainside and outwash valley horticulture," Roland explained. Now is the time to look back to the country's early food production methods.

The country's grasslands and forests would be particularly well-suited to organic and biodiverse agriculture, he said. "Modern 'organic' agriculture often does not do much more than change the sprays and offer a bit of focus on soil health. If the overall framework is still industrial-scale tillage, then 'organic' alone isn't much of an improvement." He proposes instead regenerative agriculture, permaculture and carbon farming.

"In the long term," Roland said, "I believe that truly sustainable economic and ecological growth will come from Kazakhstan focusing on its ancient agricultural history and incredible resources."

These include biodiverse food forests and vast grasslands, which can produce useful yields with little to no input, Roland said. "Mimicking the natural Kazakh ecosystems could produce a new form of mixed perennial agriculture, with many opportunities for unique value-added products." Among these products could be fruits like pears, plums, peaches and many more; nuts; a variety of berries; vegetables; herbs; honey and maple syrup; plus some smaller livestock. Most of these, Roland said, have been part of Kazakhstan's indigenous ecosystem for years.

Kazakhstan's grasslands, if managed holistically, could be systems adaptable enough to withstand changing climates, weather and politics and that could produce enough meat for domestic and export markets, Roland said, sustaining horses, sheep, goats, deer, elk, buffalo and other smaller animals producing cheese, yogurt, kumis, leather and fur.

"The Kazakh people are brilliant and resilient," Roland concluded. "Despite attempts to crush nomadic culture and massive apple forest biodiversity, Kazakhstan's ecosystems and organic farmers can hold the key to a sustainable and regenerative future."

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BUSINESS

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

• Consumption of liquefied gas in Kazakhstan reached about 600,000 tonnes, Kazakh Vice Minister of Energy Magzum Mirzagaliyev said at a March 19 Central Communications Services (CCS) briefing. "To date, we produce 2.5 million tonnes and consume about 600,000 tonnes," said Mirzagaliyev, indicating the volume of production of liquefied gas exceeds its consumption. According to him, this type of gas is produced by 10 enterprises, including CNPC, Aktobemunaigas, three domestic oil refining plants and other concerns. "Gas is a valuable raw material in the oil and chemical sector. In this regard, it is planned to build an oil and chemical plant which will produce polypropylene and polyethylen. The project will be in the Atyrau region, in the area of the National Oil Refining Plant," he concluded.

"In the near future, Kazakhstan will adopt orders regulating the procedure of subsoil granting in exchange for investment and technology," Minister of Investment and Development Asset Issekeshiev announced March 18 at the sixth mining forum on promoting investment and innovation in the mining industry. "I think that in the next two weeks the order will be adopted and in the near future will be registered in the Ministry of Justice," he said. In accordance with the order, two commissions will be set up in the Ministry of Energy and Ministry of Investment and Development, Issekeshiev added. The commission of the former will consider questions of mineral resources, while the hydrocarbons commission of the latter will cover the issues of provision of solid minerals. "The procedure is bound to be published in April. Those investors who want to get deposit in exchange for investment and technology may apply to the relevant ministries," he concluded.

"Wind, solar and geothermal energy sources will be used at the sites of the international specialised exhibition EXPO 2017," Chairman of the Board of the Astana Expo 2017 National Company Talgat Yermegiyev said at a March 19 Central Communications Services (CCS) briefing. "Since the theme of the exhibition will be the future of energy, the facilities will be partially covered with solar panels that produce 7 MW and wind turbines which will generate energy for illumination. This will be enough for entrances and passages, so-called 'low energy,'" said Yermegiyev. According to him, geothermal sources will operate at the sites which will supply the Kazakhstan pavilion and office organisers with thermal energy.

Three billion tenge (US\$16 million) will be allocated from the National Fund and the national budget for pilot work on oil and gas, Minister of Investments and Development Asset Issekeshiev said March 12 at the first international forum Geologic Secret Service: Oil and Gas. "In 2015, 3.26 billion tenge (US\$17.6 million) will be allocated from the [national] budget and the National Fund for financing of new regional work on oil and gas," said Issekeshiev. He also noted that the ministry is continuing to work on a geologic map of Kazakhstan. "A special programme has been developed. Until the end of 2015, it will be possible to receive any information without special request," he concluded.

Head of the Kyzylorda regional department of business and tourism Telman Suleimenov announced March 22 that plans have begun to open two new ventures in the Aral Sea region for the production of soft drinks and purified drinking water. State support will be provided for these projects, he said, adding that land in the Kazalinsk industrial zone with all the necessary infrastructure has been allocated for the project. Suleimenov noted production will be launched by the summer season, when demand for drinks and bottled water will rise sharply.

Lack of Funds Causes Delay in Modernisation of Kazakh Oil Refineries



By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – KazMunayGas recently announced that the modernisation of its oil refineries will be prolonged due to lack of funds. In spite of the ban on Russian fuel, fuel prices will not be affected and there are sufficient reserves from all sources in the state, according to Tengrinews.

"We plan to finish the modernisation in 2016, but as you know, there are many factors which affect it. For example, availability of money is a very important factor. We get the money from parties which refine oil in our company. We planned to refine 15 million tonnes in January and February 2015, but we had to change the plan and refined only 14.3 million tonnes. This means that 700,000 tonnes weren't refined in the period of time and we didn't get payment for it and don't have the money for the modernisation. If this trend continues, I really don't know if we will have enough monetary funds for the modernisation or not. Maybe we will have to pro-

long the term," said Vice General Director of Refining and Marketing Yerlan Koibagarov at a panel discussion in Astana on March 5, as reported by kursiv.kz.

Koibagarov also said that large quantities of low-cost Russian products were imported to the state and until quite recently KazMunayGas had to temporarily suspend its own refineries. He added that the modernisation of oil refineries and ongoing maintenance are completely different types of operations. Ongoing maintenance efforts are permanent because Kazakh oil refineries aren't new and some of them were constructed decades ago.

KazEnergy Association General Director Asset Magauov told about the oil refineries' modernisation. "All oil refineries are slowly modernised and now we can see well-defined improvement of light-oil product quality," he said at the March 5 panel discussion, Tengrinews reported.

Vice Minister of Energy Magzum Mirzagaliyev stated that beginning March 5, a temporary ban on the import of defined types of

fuel from Russia would be imposed for 45 days.

"It is connected with indicative balances, which are signed with Russia on an annual basis. We can get the defined preliminarily-agreed quantity of petroleum, oil and lubricants free of duty in accordance with the documents," he said at the same panel discussion, according to Tengrinews.

Mirzagaliyev again stated that the prohibition won't affect Kazakh gasoline prices and there is a sufficient supply of gasoline and diesel fuel in the country.

"For example, we agreed that we will get 1.1 million tonnes of gasoline and 760,000 tonnes of diesel fuel this year. Due to the fact that we imported sufficient quantities of petroleum, oil and lubricants this year, we have to control the import of the remaining quantities of the products and import them before the end of this year to avoid deficiencies," he said. He again stated that the prohibition won't affect on gasoline price in Kazakhstan and there are sufficient reserves of gasoline and diesel fuel in the state.

Kazakhstan Imposes Temporary Ban on Some Russian Fuel Imports

By Julia Rutz

An official ban on imports of Russian motor fuels, like light distillates and diesel fuel products, will be in force from March 5–April 20, the Kazakh Ministry of Energy press service announced.

According to the order, signed by Minister of Energy Vladimir Shkolnik, the ministry's Oil Industry Development Department should inform Kazakhstan Temir Zholy to undertake measures implementing the order in the prescribed manner. Law enforcement should be controlled by First Deputy Minister of Energy Uzbekai Karabalin.

It was reported earlier that the ban was introduced in order to ensure energy security connected with the danger of impeding the activity of the biggest local oil refineries due to the surplus of petroleum products imported from Russia. The Kazakh Ministry of Energy failed to find a compromise with its Russian counterparts limiting imports of oil products to the country. As a result, it was decided to undertake drastic measures to solve the problem. Sauat Minbayev, head of KazMunayGas, which owns three existing refineries in Kazakhstan, said in February that the volume of imports from Russia was slightly higher than the previously-indicated volumes. According to him, the level of light oil supplies from Russia was at the annual level of 1.8 million tonnes. This level was confirmed as indicative of the oil balance between Kazakhstan and Russia.

"You know that in December we lowered the price of gasoline 92 and diesel fuel twice. All stores are now completely filled with diesel fuel, which composes almost 350,000 tonnes. Thus we are facing a problem. If cheap gasoline and gasoline that is now cheaper in Russia rushes into the country, it can cause problems for

our plants and a lot of people may lose their jobs. Right now we are trying to somehow keep our relations with Russia on a reasonable level. We will meet with the Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation to decide how to tackle this situation, so that we won't harm local producers and, on the other hand, can ensure a sufficient inflow of cheap gasoline," said Shkolnik while speaking to deputies of Parliament.

SHKOLNIK: "If cheap gasoline and gasoline that is now cheaper in Russia rushes into the country, it can cause problems for our plants and a lot of people may lose their jobs."

This is not the first time Kazakhstan has introduced a ban on imports of Russian petroleum products. Such measures were applied in 2013 and 2014 because of the same reasons. Addressing the problem of Kazakh oil processing plants, Karabalin said that the general amount of gasoline 92 reached 400,000 tonnes, leading to the fact that factories stopped operating.

"This is the worst option for two reasons. First, we have to import a particular amount of fuel from Russia that is defined by the outline plan. If we import the entire amount during the first two quarters of the year, we won't be able to import fuel during the last two quarters. Secondly, if plants stop operating we can't get the profit, which immediately affects the national and local budgets and these amounts are estimated in billions of tenge," explained Karabalin.

Int'l, Domestic Oil and Gas Experts Discuss Exploration in Kazakhstan at Astana Forum

By Yelden Sarybay

ASTANA – The first international forum on oil and gas exploration titled, "Kazakhstan Geology Forum: Oil & Gas in Focus," took place in Astana's Rixos Hotel on March 12–13 with the support of the Ministry of Investment and Development of Kazakhstan.

"Since independence, the theme of oil and gas geology has been discussed at such a high level with the involvement of well-known geologists, geophysicists, specialists, organisers of the prospecting business, scientists, as well as representatives of foreign oil and gas companies and government agencies for the first time," President of Kazakhstan Society of Oil Industry Workers and Geologists Baltabek Kuandykov told the forum.

Minister of Investment and Development Asset Issekeshiev who took part in the plenary session on the resource potential of mineral resources of Kazakhstan, its status, problems, innovative vector of development and real prospects, announced that, "In 2015, 3.26 billion tenge (US\$17.6 million) from the national budget and the National Fund will be used to finance new regional exploration works on oil and gas. In particular, two geophysical surveys and the drilling of two support parametric wells. The state will be financing the study of less explored areas, where it's cur-



A participant addresses the March 12–13 Kazakhstan Geology Forum in Astana.

rently problematic to attract investors."

According to Issekeshiev, despite the optimisation of budget programmes in several areas, oil exploration is one of the few industries for which the state allocated more money than last year.

"In general, we are currently developing new approaches. The last two to three years were great for the development of exploration.

A special programme has been developed. This year, through our geology committee, we will provide a digital map that will include information on oil and gas sites. By the end of 2015, this interactive map will be able to provide any information without the need to request," said Issekeshiev.

Also during the forum, First Deputy Minister of Energy Uzbekai Karabalin said that Kazakhstan together

with an international consortium will start the realisation of "Eurasia," the largest oil project in the Caspian Basin worth \$500 million.

According to him, much of the oil in Kazakhstan is extracted mainly in the fields of the Caspian depression, where up to 75-80 percent of hydrocarbon resources of the country are concentrated. A reduction in the production at major sites, such as Tengiz and Kar-

achaganak is expected in 15 to 20 years, but exploration of resources in deep horizons can compensate for this trend.

The forum programme covered the development of the resource potential of Kazakhstan, subsurface geophysical technology, the field of research, the development of marine areas, scientific research and questions of financing exploration work, training and retraining.

Specific topics of discussion included attracting investments in exploration, improving the legal framework, developing high and hard deposits of oil, associated gas utilisation and the introduction of innovative methods and technologies in the oil and gas industry for the study of deep oil and gas reserves.

Among the guests of the forum were Chairman of the Board of KazMunayGas Sauat Mynbayev, Chairman of the Committee on Geology and Mineral Resources of the Ministry of Investment and Development Bazarbai Nurabayev, Chief Executive Officer of the Kazenergy Association Asset Magauov and Chief Geologist of Rosgeologiya Alexey Soloviyev.

The event was attended by about 300 specialists from the oil and gas industry, as well as representatives of more than 70 companies from Kazakhstan, Canada, the Netherlands, Russia, Uzbekistan, Belarus, France, the U.K. and Germany.

EDITORIAL & OPINIONS

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Institutional Reforms to Help Ensure Kazakhstan's Sustainable Development

The decision by President Nursultan Nazarbayev to seek reelection next month was neither unexpected nor unwelcome to many citizens. His leadership has been an ever-present factor in Kazakhstan's development as an economy and society since independence. The multiple challenges to our country's continued growth and stability were the reason the presidential election was brought forward. In difficult times, his record in guiding Kazakhstan may yet again prove attractive to voters.

But in announcing his candidature at the Nur Otan Party Congress in Astana earlier this month, the President made clear that his appeal to the electorate was not relying on his past record or anxiety about the challenges that the country faces. Instead, he set out a series of five major institutional reforms needed to continue to drive Kazakhstan forward.

They were also reforms which will chime with the demands of many citizens. The creation of a modern, professional public service with the expertise, commitment and values to serve the needs of the country is essential. New initiatives to strengthen meritocracy and end nepotism in the recruitment and promotion of public servants will be welcomed. Casting the net wider including through the recruiting of successful business leaders for public office and government makes a great deal of sense. So, too, will renewed efforts to root out corruption at every level. Kazakhstan is judged as a less corrupt society than many of its neighbours but there is no room for complacency.

This is also true about strengthening the rule of law and property rights. Continued reform in this area is needed to give both foreign and domestic investors additional confidence to do business in Kazakhstan. Our country's impressive economic progress has been helped by the strong legal protections for investors and a lack of government interference in contracts. But Kazakhstan is in a global competition for outside investment which grows fiercer every year.

It is not, however, only foreign investors who depend on the rule of law. Effective and independent law enforcement agencies and judges are important for everyone in the country. Requiring all new judges to have five years' experience of courtrooms and the introduction of a one-year probationary period for newly appointed judges will help meet these criteria.

The wider use of modern communications technology including mini video cameras worn by individual police officers will boost public trust in the police and reduce the potential for petty corruption. But this must go alongside, as President Nazarbayev said, a more rigorous recruitment, training and development process for police officers. All seeking to join Kazakhstan's law enforcement agencies along with serving officers must have the right character, values and motivation and training.

Nursultan Nazarbayev's Congress speech also outlined new measures to accelerate the diversification of the economy and ensure all parts of the country share in its growth. He stressed that the country's industrialisation programme – given a new impetus through the Nurlu Zhol economic stimulus programme – was necessary to provide stable employment and to continue the expansion of the country's fast-growing middle class. And this is a welcome emphasis as it is the middle class that will provide modern Kazakhstan with a strong backbone given that their direct stake in the country's prosperity and future will ensure our country stays on the right track.

It is for this reason, too, that a priority must be placed on developing the country's service sector and the number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It is the countries which provide the best conditions and support for entrepreneurs to set up and grow their own businesses which will be most successful in the decades ahead. If Kazakhstan wants to be in this select group of countries –

and achieve its ambition of joining the ranks of the top 30 economies by 2050 – a dynamic and thriving SME sector is essential.

Among the specific areas of the economy identified for attention were agriculture and tourism. Improved government support for the farming industry will help promote rural development. This will be aided by the hoped-for involvement of major international businesses in setting up new plants to process agricultural commodities within the country's borders.

Rural employment and incomes will also receive a much-needed boost through the expansion of the country's fledgling tourism industry. Astana Times readers who have travelled widely will know that Kazakhstan's spectacular and varied natural beauty, its history and culture means its potential as a tourist destination is rich. But it remains largely untapped. By investing to improve the tourist infrastructure in all parts of the country, a successful industry can be built. EXPO 2017 in Astana and, of course, the 2022 Winter Olympics, if Almaty's bid is successful, will be important levers to achieve this ambition.

Turning from the economy, the President stressed the importance of the cohesiveness of Kazakhstan's society and the rights of its citizens. Our country's shared sense of purpose has been at the heart of its growth since independence. President Nazarbayev said the concept of Mangilik El – the Eternal Nation – provided the framework for common values such as equality, industriousness, honesty, education, secularism and tolerance to be promoted.

As we see increasing divisions around the world on religious and ethnic lines, Kazakhstan's harmonious and stable society is something which we must both take pride in and protect. What this means is that all citizens, whatever the race, gender and social origin, deserve to be valued and supported to make their full contribution to Kazakhstan's future. Religious diversity, one of the strengths of the country, must be protected.

Finally, President Nazarbayev set out his determination to ensure the state worked better for the benefit of its citizens. He called for improved accountability of public bodies, increased transparency and greater public participation in decision-making including in how budgets are spent locally. A new law on access to public information will help this process.

Citizens are also to be encouraged by new complaint systems to raise poor or unfair treatment from civil servants and public bodies so standards are continuously improved. There is more to be done to break out of the old Soviet mentality that people should be grateful for whatever the state provides. It is why handing the delivery of public services to civil society institutions, wherever possible, is an important step in the right direction.

What was also interesting was the President's suggestion that all these institutional reforms would pave the way for additional political reform including the election of local executives and the transfer of responsibilities from the President's office to the Government and Parliament. But he also stressed the importance of well-thought through reforms based on the "strong state and economy first, politics second" principle to ensure Kazakhstan's continued stability. At a time of increased turmoil and regional and global threats, few can doubt this prize has never been more important to Kazakhstan's future.

In ending his speech, President Nazarbayev remarked that experience from other countries demonstrated that it could take four to five decades to create a strong, developed and liberal society. He could have added that it is perhaps a mark of Kazakhstan's development since independence, that critics, both domestic and international, have a tendency to forget that our country is only half-way through this period.

Kazakhstan Ready and Able to Host 2022 Winter Olympic Games

By Eran Idrissou

When two years ago we launched our bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, few commentators gave Kazakhstan a chance. But following the IOC committee's successful visit to Almaty last month, the mood has changed. We are now viewed as serious contenders.

This knowledge has unleashed a huge sense of pride and excitement in the city and country. We are proud that we could host such an illustrious event and have the chance to show off modern Kazakhstan. We are excited as well at the prospect of working with the Olympic movement to deliver a modern but "real" Winter Games which is true to its great tradition.

We are confident that Almaty has a great deal to offer. It is cradled by the majestic Tien Shan mountains, which lie on the city's doorstep and will provide athletes and visitors breathtaking views. We have a strong winter sports tradition as well as experience of hosting major winter events such as the 2011 Asian Winter Games.

This means that eight of the 14 competition venues which will host Olympic events are already built and in use. They include the Medeo stadium, where many world records have been set. Three more venues are under construction for the 2017 Winter Universiade, which will see more than 2,000 student athletes from more than 50 countries compete.

It is precisely because so much of the infrastructure is already built that our \$3.5 billion budget is lower than recent Games, as the IOC wants. We hope to demonstrate that the Olympic spirit depends not on money but on dedication, hard work and ambition.

We also believe our country mirrors the



values that underpin the Olympic Movement. Kazakhstan is a country where people of more than 100 different ethnic backgrounds and 40 faiths live in peace, tolerance and harmony. If there is one nation ready to welcome citizens from all over the world with a warm heart, it is Kazakhstan.

We are immensely proud as well not only of our country's natural beauty but also the Kazakhstan we have built since independence 23 years ago. We have gone from being a remote part of the old Soviet Union to a dynamic, modern nation on course to be one of the top 30 global economies in the world by 2050.

Almaty itself illustrates both our rich tradition and recent success. On the historic Silk Road, it has been a melting pot of language, art and culture for centuries. Yet it is an exciting, vibrant, modern city which will offer something for everyone and where one in three of its population is under 30.

In global terms, it might be a relatively small city of 1.5 million people, but we intend to use its size to its advantage to stage a truly memorable Games. We can

host the most compact Winter Olympics in many years with all venues within a 30-kilometer radius of the Olympic Village.

We have made sure, too, in our bid that hosting the Olympics will have a positive impact for generations to come. It will strengthen Almaty's position as the center of Eurasian mountain tourism and winter sporting events. All our Olympic facilities will be used for training new generations of athletes, hosting events and serving as wonderful bases for recreation.

The 2022 Winter Olympics will also drive wider economic and social progress. The Olympic Park will become a great residential, commercial and tourist center, close to our international airport. The new convention center will boost the city's ambition to host international exhibitions and meetings.

Last month, when we welcomed the IOC delegation and shared details about our bid, we showed how strongly we shared their vision of lowering hosting costs, integrating sustainability into our planning and leaving a lasting legacy. We also promised to continue working fully, transparently and openly with them to present the true potential of Almaty and do the Games and Olympic Movement proud.

We are truly excited. We want the world to witness for themselves the different cultures, traditions and nations that live united in Kazakhstan. It is a spirit which underpins both the Olympic Movement and our country. It is why we are ready to make history in 2022.

The author is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The opinion first appeared in The Salt Lake Tribune.

Whether a Common EAEU Currency?

By Olzhas Khudaibergenov

The other day, a list of instructions given by Russian President Vladimir Putin following a meeting with members of his government was published on the Kremlin's website. Among the orders was one concerning a prospective Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) currency union, a proposal he again voiced at a joint press conference with Kazakhstan and Belarus leaders in the Akorda on March 20.

"The Bank of Russia, in cooperation with the Russian government and member states' central banks and Eurasian Economic Union members themselves [are tasked] with determining how we will further integrate in regards to currency and the financial sectors. We will study the viability of establishing a currency union," the Russian president said.

He assigned Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Chairman of the Central Bank Elvira Nabiullina with studying the issue.

A number of sources, such as the Alpari Broker Company drew incorrect conclusions from the statement, saying that a single currency will appear on Jan. 1, 2016.

But, Putin's instructions only very vaguely define what exactly a viability and opportunity study is. This means that before something is offered to partners, they need to understand whether the currency union is beneficial for all sides. If they decide that it is beneficial, the issue will be brought up for discussion by member states. All EAEU member states have the right to bring up concerns or ideas. There has not been any mandate creating any sort of currency union.

Secondly, if Russia decides that a currency union is beneficial, a long process of negotiations, consultations and ratifications will take place. They may last for years, which makes the chances of creating a currency union by January 1, 2016 almost zero.

Thirdly, a currency union cannot function without a single regulator, which according to Section 2 of Article 103 of the EAEU Treaty, will be located "in Almaty in 2025." In other words, a currency un-



ion can only be established after 2025.

Fourthly, it is difficult to assess what the currency union will bring to Kazakhstan, as there is no structure to do it yet. If national currencies, including the tenge, are replaced, it would harm national sovereignty. It is unlikely that EAEU member states would agree to something like that, especially consider-

ing that among them could be countries such as Turkey. If a supranational currency is created, it will not harm any nation's sovereignty and is 100 percent debatable. If this becomes the case, minor organisational details will be discussed. But, the main question still remains, how does Russia benefit?

Fifth, the currency union would likely only be discussed when all member states show signs of economic growth for several consecutive years, mutual trade turnover has been growing, national currencies are stable and there are no external obstacles such as sanctions. In terms of the economy, not all of the above stated conditions have been met. Therefore, opinion of the experts on the timeliness of the single currency is not only wrong, but also envisages an extra burden on the countries at a time when they already have enough internal problems.

The author is an independent economic analyst and formerly an adviser to the Chairman of the National Bank of Kazakhstan.

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Sincerely,
Roman Vassilenko
Editor-in-Chief
The Astana Times

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OPINIONS

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Kazakhstan Works to Advance Human Rights, Nuclear Disarmament, Country's Top Diplomat in Geneva Says

By Gulbarshyn Sabayeva

In an interview with this newspaper, Mukhtar Tleuberdi, Kazakhstan's Permanent Representative at the UN Office in Geneva, discusses the country's approaches to working with and within the UN Human Rights Council, as well as priorities in the areas of nuclear disarmament and accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

What are the permanent mission's responsibilities?

The UN office in Geneva is the second largest body of the UN system. The Geneva office serves as the centre of diplomatic meetings on disarmament, human rights, poverty, sustainable development and emergency humanitarian assistance.

About 180 permanent representatives are accredited to the office. Almost all major international organisations are represented too.

Since 1946, the UN European and then the UN Geneva office was led by representatives of Poland, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, France, Russia and Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan takes special pride in the fact that Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was deputy secretary-general of the United Nations and the director-general of the UN Office in Geneva from May 2011 until October 2013. He was the first Asian representative to head the UN Office in Geneva.

Kazakhstan's permanent mission was established by a presidential decree in December 1995 and has



Mukhtar Tleuberdi had its own building in downtown Geneva since 2006.

How do you see the results of the 28th session of the Human Rights Council and the Conference on Disarmament that took place recently here in Geneva?

Each year, in the beginning of March, leaders from almost every UN member state converge on Geneva for the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Conference on Disarmament.

This year, Kazakhstan was represented by Minister of Foreign Affairs Erlan Idrissov. In his speeches, he clearly outlined Kazakhstan's human rights and disarmament initiatives.

Our country makes targeted and consistent efforts to accede to all major international instruments promoting and protecting human rights. In February, Kazakhstan completed ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was recommended by a number of countries during the second phase of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Kazakhstan diligently submits periodic reports to UN treaty bod-

ies, has been actively involved at the representative level of the organisation and has defended its reports. All of this effort goes to show how seriously our country takes its dealings with the United Nations.

The foreign minister also held bilateral meetings with Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Michael Möller, acting director-general of the UN office in Geneva and secretary-general of the Conference on Disarmament.

During his conversation with the high commissioner, the minister expressed his satisfaction with the current level of cooperation with the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He praised the council for its timely response to challenges all over the world.

The foreign minister also stated that our country has adopted measures to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens.

Minister Idrissov also invited the Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan.

Recently, Maina Kiai, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Peaceful Assembly visited our country. How is Kazakhstan working with the Human Rights Council's mechanisms and special mandate holders?

I would like to specifically highlight our country's cooperation with the special procedures mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council. In 2009, our country issued an open invitation to all special procedures mandate holders and welcomed nine special rapporteurs, including two experts visiting Kazakhstan twice which is a rare exception. Baskut

Tuncak, the special rapporteur on toxic and dangerous materials and members of the working group on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises will visit before the end of the year. In accordance with the needs of these experts, Kazakhstan is scheduling these visits.

We are interested in further expanding dialogue with the council's special procedures mandate holders.

The progress seen over the past nine years and the positive dialogue with the Human Rights Council suggests the need to continue improving the working methods of the council and its special procedures.

What are Kazakhstan's priorities at the Conference on Disarmament?

We consider the Conference on Disarmament the sole permanent multilateral negotiating ground in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Our President initiated a UN Universal Declaration of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World. Our experts are working with the five nuclear powers, other interested countries and the UN Secretariat to promote the draft declaration.

Another priority for Kazakhstan in the framework of the Conference is to complete the institutionalisation of a zone free of nuclear weapons in Central Asia. Last year, the five nuclear powers signed a protocol to the Semipalatinsk Treaty under which they pledged that they would not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. Currently, two countries have already ratified the protocol. We expect that by the

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference which begins in late April, the others will also have ratified.

As for the NPT Review Conference, Kazakhstan is actively involved. We regret to note that one of the key decisions of the 2010 NPT Review Conference has still not realised – the conference on the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East has not yet been organised.

Our top priority is nuclear disarmament. This is not only because of our quite recent tragic past, the consequences of which are still being felt, but because of a pragmatic view of the future completely free from the deadly weapons.

How would you describe nuclear non-proliferation efforts and their future generally?

Despite the general stagnation in the global disarmament process, I should note the many past achievements. The closure of the Semipalatinsk test site prompted the closure of other nuclear test sites. Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus's abandonment of nuclear weaponry helped as did the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. There is also a significant reduction in the number of nuclear weapons in Russia and the United States through the Treaty on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms as well as unilateral reductions by the UK and France. The expansion of nuclear weapon free zones around the world also played a major role.

In terms of trying to make forecasts for the future, it's a thankless job. However, I would still hope that

the major world powers are fully aware of their responsibility to the future of humanity and to significantly advance towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

Where is Kazakhstan on the path to WTO accession?

Kazakhstan has been working to join the WTO since 1996. Over the past several years, negotiations have been intensified. The negotiating team, headed by Zhanar Aitzhanova, Minister for Economic Integration, aims to participate in the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference in December in Nairobi as a full member of the organisation.

Joining the WTO is one of Kazakhstan's strategic priorities. Kazakhstan should be involved in the processes of regulating international trade.

There is a WTO unit in our Permanent Mission, which is directly involved in negotiations regarding Kazakhstan's accession to the WTO.

One of the mission's major tasks is providing the negotiating team with information and analytical support regarding consumer markets and other nations' agreements with the WTO.

The mission also elaborates on further training of Kazakh specialists on regulating international trade and WTO accession. Cooperation takes place with the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, SPECA) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) for technical assistance projects regarding facilitating trade procedures, trade policy development and human capacity building in foreign trade regulation.

OECD Strengthens Partnership with Kazakhstan

By Saltanat Janenova

On Jan. 22 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov and Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Angel Gurría signed a memorandum of understanding between Kazakhstan and the OECD on the implementation of the Country Programme of Cooperation for 2015-2016.

The country programme ac-



knowledges Kazakhstan's commitment to a plan of reforms

and its willingness and ability to design these reforms taking into account good international policy practices. The programme could lead to more than 20 policy reviews, cooperation in capacity building projects, increased levels of participation in six OECD committees and possible adherence to 28 OECD legal instruments.

Kazakhstan is one of four partner economies that have been selected for this bilateral work programme covering areas such as public sec-

tor integrity and governance, environment, health, taxation, competition and business climate and statistics.

After signing the agreement, Massimov said that the "introduction of the OECD best practices in our policies is a prerequisite for strengthening our role in a global economy." Gurría also said "Kazakhstan is a leading economy in Central Asia strategically located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. I am confident that positive spill-

over effects of the country programme will benefit the reform agendas of other countries in the region."

The country programme is a new OECD tool that enables partner economies to leverage OECD expertise and standards, strengthen institutions and build capacity for policy reforms. The programme marks the beginning of a new phase of the OECD's ongoing cooperation with Kazakhstan.

The Coordination Council for OECD-Kazakhstan Partnership

chaired by Prime Minister Massimov decided March 2 to assign personal responsibility for implementation of the project of the country programme to the heads and first deputy heads of government bodies, which will facilitate the process of strengthening linkages between Kazakh stakeholders and OECD Committees.

Saltanat Janenova is a policy consultant and instructor at the Graduate School of Public Policy, Nazarbayev University.

Astana, Budapest Build on Strong Political, Economic, Cultural Ties, Kazakh Ambassador Says

By Gulbarshyn Sabayeva

Ahead of the visit to Astana by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in early April, Nurbakh Rustemov, Kazakhstan's Ambassador in Budapest, shared his views on the bilateral relations and their future, touching, among other things on the interesting and long-standing cultural links between the two countries.

In your interview last year with our newspaper, you said "In our cooperation with Hungary, we try not to confine ourselves to mere political, economic, trade and social areas. Our goal is to also attach high importance to literary and cultural ties and deepen mutual respect based on our common roots." What steps are being taken in this direction? What are the future plans?

When Prime Minister Karim Massimov unveiled Abai's sculpture that was placed on Astana Street in Budapest, I thought "Abai should not remain just a monument in Hungary." Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev praises and publicises the wise Abai at home and abroad. I believe this noble cause should be continued by all public officials and representatives of intellectual circles. If Abai's imaginative poetry and humanistic philosophy gain wide recognition in the Hungarian language, it will open the door to other diamonds of Kazakh literature. After the interview last year, we



Nurbakh Rustemov

began developing action plans for the proposed translation of literature in the context of cultural ties. Last August Kazakh Minister of Culture Arystanbek Mukhamadiuly met with leaders of the Hungarian cultural and humanitarian institutions and discussed cooperation prospects.

Early this year, Foreign Affairs Minister Yerlan Idrissov noted the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate will be celebrated in those countries where the groups of Kazakhs are concentrated. Hungary is a land having common roots with Kazakhs. Is there any information of Kazakh history in Hungarian museums?

Every time I visit the two-century-old National Museum and Ethnographic Museum in Budapest, I start looking for Turkic and Central Asian titles among permanent exhibitions. But the share of groups of the Kipchak (Cuman) origin believed to link

our common roots with Hungarians in the modern Hungary's population is insignificant.

It is believed that Turkic-Mongolian tribes mixed with the Finno-Ugric peoples and settled during Genghis Khan's empire. When the Kazakh Khanate was only emerging, Hungary already was one of the high-powered kingdoms in Central Europe. In modern Hungarian museums, one can find exhibits relating to the Soviet era and independent Kazakhstan, but the number of artifacts dating to times of common pre-history is close to nothing. I believe this gap can be filled by a mobile exposition.

How much interest do Hungarian historians demonstrate towards Kazakh history?

Among Hungarian ethnographers and anthropologists, there are some who attempt to identify connections with Turkic nations and some who gravitate towards the idea of their Finno-Ugric origin. I try to understand why some Hungarians, in whose European language the word "kurultaj" was preserved, want to consider themselves the "most Western Turks." It seems that modern Hungarian researchers seeking to learn the history of the Turkic nations fell under the influence of Turanism ideology as well.

In December 2014, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Kazakh Central State

Museum and the Hungarian Natural History Museum to determine a scientific foundation for the activities described above. Now Kazakh and Hungarian scientists will be able to hold joint research and expert reviews.

Among the issues discussed by the foreign ministers of the two countries last February was the Ukrainian crisis. In this respect, the countries' liberals often criticise Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's policy as pro-Russian. How did Hungarians accept the peace efforts taken by Kazakhstan?

Prominent representatives of the political establishment and local experts in Hungary gave high evaluation to the peace efforts taken recently by President Nazarbayev between Ukraine and Russia and the West with respect to the Ukrainian crisis. The head of state made a huge contribution to the creation of the necessary prerequisites for implementation of the second Minsk Agreement. The presidents of Russia, Ukraine, France, US and the German Chancellor regularly consult with our President.

I believe that during the Ukrainian crisis, our President has once again proven himself a world-class diplomat. Being a part of an economic union with Russia and at the same time supporting Ukraine's integrity, offering help with Ekibastuz coal at the time of the energy crisis in Kiev, keeping its own country neutral while Russia and the West play an

economic and food sanctions game between themselves, preventing our national currency (tenge) from devaluation notwithstanding the collapse of the ruble – all these result from our President's political foresight and proficiency.

His busy schedule calls to memory one of the final passages in "My Life," the autobiography of Golda Meir. She wrote about the difficulties of existing in a world that is often insensitive to the sufferings of small nations. Her words miraculously echo the statement of our head of state, "From my experience, I feel that the years to come will become the time of global trials. The entire architecture of the world will be changing. Not all countries will be able to get through these complications in a decent manner. Only strong states, with their people united, will manage to do that."

This year is the 70th anniversary of victory in World War II. Are there any updates in respect to Kazakh soldiers who took part in the Hungarian liberation?

In 2014, our embassy began its search for the burial places of Kazakh Soviet soldiers reported missing in Hungary. In 1944-1945 the 72nd and 73rd guard rifle divisions took part in the battles for liberation of the territories of Hungary, South Czech Republic and Austria. During these battles, around 140,000 Soviet soldiers and officers fell in the lands of Hungary.

There were a lot of difficulties in

connection with the search for information about Kazakhstanis fallen, taken captive and missing. The diplomatic corps forged close links with the Russian Ministry of Defense and a memorandum of cooperation in the area of military and memorial work was signed. Representatives of the embassies of Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine take part in the burial ceremonies of remains of newly-found and unknown soldiers in Hungary. It is a settled tradition.

Are there representatives of Kazakhstan who reside in Hungary?

There are quite a few Kazakhs permanently living here, predominantly our fellow countrymen who married local nationals and remained. Some of them accepted Hungarian nationality. Protection of rights and legal interests of Kazakhstan citizens is the obligation of every diplomatic mission.

What is the news in cultural relations between the two countries?

In April, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will pay an official visit to Kazakhstan. In the framework of his visit, one can enjoy the performance of the Hungarian National Ballet's prima ballerina, Kazakhstan-born Aliya Tanykpayeva and her Hungarian partner Zoltán Oláh who will both play the first parties in Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake" at Astana Opera National Opera and Ballet Theatre. The artists of the Astana Ballet theatre will then demonstrate their creativity to Hungarian audiences at the Budapest Palace of Arts in May.

An expedition entitled "From Altai to Danube" in connection with the anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate is also ready to depart.

EURASIA&WORLD

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Estonia Hopes to Increase Cooperation in Transit, Technology, Education

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – As NATO Contact Point in Kazakhstan, Ambassador of Estonia Jaan Reinhold hopes to share the values of the alliance in the country; bilaterally, the ambassador is hoping to see an increase in educational, technological and scientific exchanges during his mission here, as well increase agricultural and transit cooperation.

“The EU is currently reviewing the EU’s Central Asia strategy, and I guess we have to do the same about NATO, about NATO’s role in Central Asia and further joint activities,” he said. Undoubtedly, Kazakhstan, as a member of the Partnership for Peace Programme, is an important partner for NATO in the region, Reinhold added.

This public diplomacy – in the form of lectures, conferences and briefings on NATO’s activities and values – will be directed toward representatives of Kazakhstan’s defence services, of course, the ambassador said, but also to the general public, particularly through universities and clubs like the Academic Diplomatic Club at the Kazakh National Humanitarian Law University.

Bilaterally, transit is generating major buzz, with the head of the Port of Tallinn commenting earlier this month that they would like to be a transit point for cargo shipped



Jaan Reinhold

from China to Europe via Kazakhstan. The main issue is the opportunity to create synergy between the Silk Road and former Hanseatic League countries along the Baltic Sea, Reinhold said.

The Port of Tallinn is currently operating below its capacity, he commented, which is driving interest in shipping from Kazakhstan. “The main obstacle to that is higher tariffs for railway cargo transportation via Russia to Baltic states, but at the end of the day, the reloading and warehousing in our ports is safe, smooth and well-organised, and so could be beneficial for the Kazakh side. ... We are also offering many other investment opportunities for Kazakhstan,” he said.

Estonia-Kazakhstan relations generally are dynamic, the ambas-

sador said, with high-level visits and a bilateral governmental commission on economic affairs established in 2010. They are currently waiting for the appointment of new co-chairman of this commission by the Kazakh side, Reinhold noted, saying he hopes later this year the commission will hold a working session in Tallinn.

The 2014 agreement between the two countries on mutually promoting and protecting investments “definitely gave us more confidence to work together,” the ambassador said.

Most recently, in February, a business delegation led by former Estonian President Arnold Rüütel came to the Kazakh capital. While it is too early to determine the exact outcome of the visit, Reinhold says the Estonian side were very satisfied and that they hope to meet and follow up with potential partners soon.

“From the embassy’s point of view, we would also like to intensify cooperation in education and science, as well as tourism and culture,” Reinhold said. In education, the ambassador would like to ramp up activities with the two Estonian universities that are on the Bolashak scholarship list, he said. They would also like to send more lecturers to Kazakhstan. “We are offering courses for the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Kazakhstan; they are bringing their students or post

graduates to Estonia, to the Estonian Diplomatic School and others. We would like to show [our Kazakh partners] Estonia’s model of state administration and they are really interested,” he said.

New NATO Contact Point Hopes to Share Alliance’s Values in Central Asia, Increase Bilateral Trade

Another area of Estonian expertise the country is eager to share is in e-governance and e-services, Reinhold said. “Using e-services, we are saving about 2 percent of our gross domestic product in administration costs. I believe it is relevant also for Kazakhstan as well, to provide better online and other services to its citizens, not only to save their time but also to reduce bureaucracy and reduce administrative costs.” Most government services in Estonia are internet-based, he noted, including parliamentary voting, and the Estonia E-Academy is ready to share their experiences and technology with Kazakhstan, which is in the midst of a push to modernise and streamline its government processes.

Though Estonia is much smaller

than Kazakhstan, it can be geographically important, and it also has high technology, particularly information technology and cyber security, to offer its partners, Reinhold said. On a visit to Kazakhstan’s Mazhilis last year, the ambassador was surprised to learn that Kazakhstan’s first steps toward e-governance followed Estonia’s example. He noted that 85 percent of public services in Estonia are available online, and for enterprises the figure is 100 percent. His country’s e-governance infrastructure, digital medical prescriptions, e-police, e-tax and e-customs board, among others, are studied or copied by countries across Europe and beyond, he said.

“What I think is our advantage, in Estonia and other Baltic states, is that we can speak relatively good Russian; we can understand recent Kazakh history and they can understand us, and these connections are still very rich and very good,” the ambassador said.

However, when it comes to connections between the two countries’ unions, the European Union and the new Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the ambassador says it is too early to predict what form they may take. “It is a fact that some [EAEU] signatory members are not members of the WTO [World Trade Organisation], which doesn’t make the predicting game any easier.” Estonia supports Kazakhstan’s accession to the WTO, he said, and recognises that Kazakhstan is close to the end of that process.

“From a bilateral point of view, I think we have to contribute to the bilateral trade and economic relations between the EU and Kazakhstan. Kazakh investors are very

welcome in Estonia and in the European Union and the recent trade shows the growth of our business interest in Kazakhstan in particular sectors. ... I think we cannot stop these trends despite one or another parallel developments,” he said.

There is still work to be done bilaterally, to open the doors to Estonian investors and joint work, Reinhold said. “The business climate in general is a very important issue. If there are some improvements, the investors and traders will come, definitely.” EXPO 2017 can make the country more attractive, he said. “[B]ut there is still, from my point of view, a lack of information about EXPO 2017. I know that the [expo] commissioner is paying visits to countries and I hope that very soon he is able to visit the Baltic states.” After that, Estonia will be able to make its decision.

Other incentives would also be helpful, Reinhold said. He praised the initiative last summer of eliminating short-term visa requirements for 10 countries with major investments in Kazakhstan – but pointed out that smaller countries with smaller economies were left out. “I hope personally that they will continue and enlarge this pilot project, by, for example, member states of the OECD [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development]. ... Then we’ll have an opportunity as well. Please open the gates for us and then we will come to investigate how to invest, in which sectors. ... Open the doors and we will come in.”

Reinhold pointed out that Estonia only opened an embassy in Astana in 2011. “We’ve quite recently come here, so there is a lot to discover,” he said.

New School Built by Kazakhstan Opens in Bishkek



President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev (l) and Kazakh Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Beibit Issabayev cut the ribbon on School No. 82 in Bishkek on March 20.

By Nurlan Meirmanov

Construction on a new school in Bishkek funded by Kazakhstan was completed on March 20 with an opening ceremony attended by Kyrgyzstan’s President Almazbek Atambayev.

Kazakh Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Beibit Issabayev, the mayor of Bishkek, deputies of the city’s Kenesh (city council), students and teachers of the new School No. 82, located in the Kyrgyz capital’s Ala-Too district, also attended the event.

“First of all, I would like to thank Kazakhstan’s President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who takes care not only of Kazakh people, but also of us. He helps in many things and solves many issues. I visit many countries and see that there are few such leaders as Nazarbayev, who respects and values us,” said President Atambayev in his welcoming speech at the ceremony.

Atambayev also noted that on the eve of the spring holiday Nauryz, which marks Central Asia’s traditional new year, a new school opening its doors exemplifies the consolidation of the centuries-old Kyrgyz-Kazakh friendship and the countries’ neighbourly relations.

Nazarbayev suggested building the school during his state visit to the Kyrgyz Republic in August 2012.

According to a press release from the Kazakh Embassy in Bishkek, School No. 82 can accommodate about 1,250 children on an area of 3.5 hectares and has bright classrooms, a conference hall, departments for studying various majors and developing cultural and art skills, a food court, an autonomous heating system and other necessary infrastructure.

The new school will decrease pressure on the Kyrgyz capital’s education network, as well as serve as a valuable recreation facility for the Ala-Too district, as it can hold sport, art and cultural events for children and adults.

Speaking at the event, Issabayev quoted the old proverb, “If you wish the best future for your children, give them a decent education.” He pointed out that this principle was taken as a guide by the leaders of the two states in deciding to build not one, but two schools in Kyrgyzstan. The second school, fully funded by Kazakhstan, is currently under construction in South Kyrgyzstan’s key city of Osh. Issabayev said that construction of the second school would be finished by the end of this year.

The ambassador mentioned that there is a centuries-old tradition among Kazakh and Kyrgyz people called korimdik – the giving of a special gift at a joyous moment of

getting something new and big. Following this tradition, he presented the new school with a fully-equipped computer classroom and said that the Kazakh side was also planning to deliver materials for a Kazakhstan-themed linguistic department.

Concluding his speech, Issabayev once again congratulated the pupils and teaching staff of the new school, and wished the children great successes in their studies, arts and sport activities.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have enjoyed friendly relations throughout the 23 years of their independence. The Kazakh and Kyrgyz people share a nomadic past and their languages are largely mutually intelligible. Kazakhstan has provided significant development assistance and humanitarian aid to its neighbour in times of difficulty.

In 2012, Astana announced plans to institutionalise its official development assistance programmes under the umbrella of the new agency, KazAID. Last December, President Nazarbayev signed a bill, “On Official Development Assistance,” the first of its kind in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Kyrgyzstan and other nations in Central Asia are expected to become early beneficiaries of KazAID projects.

Russia to Give up 90 percent of Taisoigan Training Ground Lease

By Yelden Sarybay

Ninety percent of the Taisoigan military training ground in Atyrau region will be withdrawn from Russian lease and returned to Kazakhstan, according to a March 3 report on Astana TV.

Kazakh Senator Sarsenbai Yensegenov, who has worked on this issue since 2011, stated that the land coordinates have already been identified and an intergovernmental agreement will soon be signed.

“In early February, the [Kazakh] President granted powers to the Ministry of Defence to sign an intergovernmental agreement. Now this project is being developed. The agreement will be submitted to Parliament and will enter into force after its ratification. As I was told by the Ministry of Defence, the document will be signed in late March,” said Yensegenov.

Several farms and more than a hundred houses are located in the Taisoigan training grounds, which

has more than 1,000 residents. Due to the fact that the land is leased, people experience serious difficulties with documentation related to the use of individual plots and pastures. Farmers cannot receive loans or lease agricultural equipment.

Another important factor in the land use resolution is the possibility of large deposits of oil located in the territory. Three fields producing 496,000 tonnes of oil per year have already been developed close to the training ground. Kondybai and Uaz deposits were discovered a few years ago in Taisoigan, but starting their development is not possible due to the jurisdiction. Overall, 25 known geological structures are located in the Taisoigan block.

The Taisoigan training ground is situated approximately 250 kilometres from Atyrau and 60 kilometres from Miyaly, the district centre. Since 1952, Strategic Rocket Forces and Soviet Air Forces stationed in the territory have conducted nuclear tests. According to official data, 24

underground nuclear explosions at a depth of 500 metres were tested in the period from 1966-1977.

Since 2000, the training ground has not witnessed a single test whatsoever. There has been no evaluation, however, of the harmful effects of the significant amount of nuclear waste on the environment and population. According to information from the Russian Ministry of Defence, the military training ground, known as the 929th State Flight Test Centre, is used as a safe zone to test aircraft for their manoeuvrability and forced landing in emergency situations. The rent received by Kazakhstan is \$4 million per year.

In a separate interview that Yensegenov gave to Radio Azattyq, the senator stated, “Russia is showing understanding on this issue. Not to say that they do not want to part with the land. I cannot say this about all polygons, but it should be noted that the polygons in the Atyrau region that were actively used during the Soviet era are now virtually free.”

Country Seeks to Mitigate Development of Potential Kazakh-Born Terrorists

By Malika Orzagaliyeva

Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee (KNB) Nurgali Bilisbekov announced recently that a Kazakh “assassin” who planned to carry out bombings and attacks against Kazakh law enforcement bodies was prevented from returning to Kazakhstan in June from Syria and that a Kyrgyz demolitions expert was apprehended in Shymkent.

“The Kyrgyz intelligence service detained and handed us a Kazakhstan citizen, who attended mine and explosives training in Syria and returned to Central Asia to commit terrorist acts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. During the arrest, an explosive device was found in his possession,” Bilisbekov said during a recent roundtable discussion titled, “International Terrorism: Modern Tendencies and Counteracting Its Effects on Youth,” according to a report by Forbes Kazakhstan. “In addition, together with our Kyrgyz and Uzbek counterparts, we neutralised

a subversive terrorist group from Syria and Turkey, which planned a series of resonant terrorist attacks in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.”

Bilisbekov reported that according to committee information, about 150 Kazakh citizens are involved in combat operations in foreign countries as part of terrorist groups. And about 200 women, who are their wives, widows and children are also involved.

According to him, some of these people are the victims of radical propaganda.

“In fact, they are deceived people, deceived by their compatriots. Many of them have realised their mistakes and want to return home, but are afraid,” Bilisbekov said.

Meanwhile, since the beginning of 2014, 15 Kazakh citizens returned home from terrorist camps. Three of them were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, criminal cases against two persons are currently being investigated and the purpose of return of two persons is being clarified, the deputy chairman said.

According to Bilisbekov, the remaining eight persons were released from criminal liability in connection with their non-participation in terrorist activities.

Also, he reported that more than 80 persons were prevented from being recruited by militants in Kazakhstan in 2014. According to him, preventive measures are being applied and Kazakhstan citizens are sometimes prohibited from going abroad as part of efforts to thwart terrorist actions.

“These approaches are justified. The flow of recruits from Kazakhstan has significantly reduced. Last year, over 80 people have renounced such intentions,” said Bilisbekov. “Another channel for recruitment is through theological institutions, most of which are illegal in these countries. We do work on getting such students to return. Already 90 young people have returned. Here, conditions for theological education on the basis of domestic institutions have been created for them.”

Nation & Capital

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SOCIETY

Medical, Social Innovations Improve Quality of Life in Mukur Village in East Kazakhstan

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SPORTS

Kazakh Skater Secures Country's First World Cup Podium in 15 years

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Nauryz Celebrations Represent Renewal, Love and Abundance

By Julia Rutz

On March 22, countries all across Middle and Central Asia will celebrate Nauryz, the New Year, or the festival of spring and abundance. Historically, this holiday, that, in accordance with some estimations, is more than 5,000 years old, had been celebrated since long before the people of this area were converted to Islam. Even to this day, the holiday remains secular.

For the people of Kazakhstan, this holiday is one of the most anticipated and joyful times of year and symbolises spring renewal, love, abundance and friendship. Traditionally, people used to wear holiday outfits and fill all vessels in the house with water, milk or grain to increase the odds of a good harvest and prosperity. Home cleaning and the planting of trees and flowers several days before the holiday is also an important ritual. It is believed that if Nauryz is celebrated in a clean house, it will protect the hosts from misfortunes and illnesses during the year.

The word "Nauryz" has Persian origins and literally translates as "a new day." In Kazakhstan, this holiday is also called "the great day of the nation." The name of the third month of the year in the Kazakh language has the same name as the holiday. It is also common to name babies born in March after the holiday. Nauryzbai or Nayryzbek are the female forms and Nauryz or



Performers celebrate Nauryz in traditional costumes.

Nauryzgul are for girls. Marriages are also very common during the holiday, as people believe that

newlyweds who marry during the equinox will always love each other and will build a happy family.

The celebration usually includes fairs, traditional sports, horse racing, dancing and singing. The city

administration also organises entertainment events and concerts by popular artists and musicians for cit-

izens and tourists. Another traditional holiday event is aitys. Aitys is a traditional Kazakh form of oral tradition that is more or less a competitive performance in the form of an improvised poetic duel between two akyns (folk poets) playing string instruments, such as the dombra or qobyz. The one who better glorifies Nauryz through their music wins.

One of the main rituals during the day is to either host or be a guest. The feast is always celebrated with traditional dishes, but the main treat is the Nauryz kozhe. This dish is prepared with seven different types of grains, they symbolise the seven elements of life and are served with water, beef jerky and airan, a cold yogurt beverage mixed with salt. Those who eat this dish on Nauryz will be lucky and healthy and their family members will not experience animosity and be under protection during the year, according to old beliefs. Apart from that, pilaf and boursaks (Kazakh buns) are must have holiday foods.

Nauryz was not celebrated in Kazakhstan during the Soviet era between 1926 and 1988. In 2001, the holiday was recognised as a national holiday and since 2009, Kazakhstan citizens have been given three days off, March 21 – 23, to enjoy the holiday and experience all the unique festivities. Because of the overlapping of the three days off with the weekend, this year the celebration will last no less than five days, from March 21 through March 25.

Kazakh Restaurateurs Trending With "Made In Kazakhstan" Foodstuffs

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Kazakhstan restaurateurs have joined the farm-to-table movement, using "Made in Kazakhstan" foodstuffs in their menus. Those in the dining and hotel business have developed long-term relationships with domestic producers due to the high quality, safety and freshness of their products.

Igor Kopailov, president of the HoReCa Kazakhstan national dining-hotel business association, is among the many who support the effort.

"Our association has a mission – the establishment of a partnership between domestic producers and businessmen. Kazakhstan restaurateurs, hotel owners and other businessmen are ready to cooperate with Kazakhstan producers. We would really appreciate if the bulk of Kazakhstan restaurateurs' menus would be made of local foodstuffs, but of course we can't and aren't going to force somebody to do it. We will only promote this trend," he said, as quoted by tengrnews.kz.

Fedor Filimonov, general manager of the Radisson Hotel in Astana, echoed his comments.

"This is undoubtedly a very right attitude, which positively affects not only consumers, but also representatives of the dining-hotel business. Using domestic products avoids problems with delivery, which guarantees our guests that our dishes are made of the freshest and the most high-quality foodstuffs of the day," he said in an interview with The Astana Times on March 19.

The movement was also reinforced by Astana restaurateur Dmitriy Akhunov, head of Dorogaya Ya Perezvonyu (which stands for Darling, I'll Call Back) restaurant.

"It is an absolutely logical statement for every state and every city. Moreover, for every field of activity. That is every businessman, be he restaurateur or a businessman of any field of activity, tries to cut down his own expenses in a number of ways. The purchase of products manufactured by domestic producers is one of those ways, especially in these hard years," he said in an interview with The Astana Times on March 19.

Filimonov added that supporting domestic producers is important to the national economy.

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Culinary Arts in Kazakhstan Heating Up as Service Sector Grows

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – As Kazakhstan develops economically and socially, its culture of hospitality is slowly shifting from the domestic realm to the professional, and while cooking professionals say there is still much ground to cover, interest in the culinary arts is growing.

"Culinary arts in the country are growing rapidly, onwards and upwards, especially ahead of EXPO 2017," President of the Kazakhstan National Culinary Association Yelena Machshinskaya told The Astana Times in a March 10 interview. The National Culinary Association was launched in 2003, she said, and joined the

World Association of Culinary Unions in 2008.

While progress has been made, she and other culinary professionals say Kazakhstan's hospitality industry needs to be taken more seriously. In a recent interview with this newspaper, Marriott Executive Chef Benoit Letellier noted that Kazakhstan's under-30 generation is starting to respect cooking as a profession, but there is still a mentality that the service industry in general is not a real career path. "In many countries, you are a professional waiter. You can build a career as a waiter and obviously advance, become managers, et cetera. But here, there isn't this building of a career as a service professional," he commented.

Continued on Page B4

Uzbek Community Leader: APK Facilitates Interethnic Accord Among Nations

By Dmitry Lee

Centuries ago Kazakh and Uzbek khanates belonged to the same dynasties. Both countries histori-

cally shared borders and Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, was, at some point, a key city in the Kazakh Khanate. In addition, some of the modern southern Kazakhstan territories were formerly part

of the Bukhara Emirate and the Kokand Khanate. Today, there are over half a million Uzbeks living in Kazakhstan, mostly in the South Kazakhstan region, according to Ikram Khashimzhanov, chairman

of the Regional Uzbek Cultural Centre.

"Since Kazakhstan gained its independence Nursultan Nazarbayev had one goal: to use the country's multiethnic community to advantage and to steer away from the political and economic deadlock and set the country on the bright path of development. On March 1, 1995, under President Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiative, a unique public institution, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK), was established. Considering that there are more than 130 ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan, just in the South Kazakhstan region there are almost half a million ethnic Uzbeks. [With such] numbers, of course, Uzbeks play a vital role in the region, contributing to the development, economy and society. Twelve years ago during the opening of the Uzbek Drama Theatre, Nazarbayev noted that Uzbeks and Kazakhs are brotherly nations, as those Uzbeks living on the territory of Kazakhstan have integrated well into the Kazakhstan society," Khashimzhanov told The Astana Times in an exclusive interview.

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Uzbek performers play traditional instruments at an ethnic celebration.

THINGS TO WATCH MARCH-APRIL

ASTANA STATE CIRCUS

March 14 - April at 4 p.m. Royal Water Circus

ROCK CLUB

March 28 at 8 p.m. Unplugged Rock Concert

ASTANA OPERA HOUSE

April 1-2 at 7 p.m. Swan Lake, Ballet

CONGRESS HALL

April 4 at 7 p.m. Flexx Show-Ballet

KAZAKHSTAN CONCERT HALL

April 5 at 7 p.m. Stars of San Remo -2015 with Son Pascal, Al Bano, Ricchi E Poveri

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Uzbek Community Leader: Assembly of People of Kazakhstan Facilitates Interethnic Accord Among Nations



Continued from Page B1

“The APK, as Europeans refer to it, is a mini version of the United Nations. It’s a unique institution that has kept all nations under one umbrella in peace, harmony, tolerance and interethnic accord. Our community is glad to have found a home in this country, where our destiny once placed us. We are the third largest ethnic group in the country and the second largest population in the South Kazakhstan region,” he continued.

The Uzbek National Association was established almost 25 years ago. Next year the association is preparing to celebrate the 25-year

anniversary and, according to the chairman, “throughout these years we have done a lot of work to organise events both in Kazakhstan and beyond the country’s borders to demonstrate our culture, customs and traditions.”

In 2007, a Kazakhstan delegation visited Seoul, South Korea, where Khashimzhanov, on behalf of the APK, shared the beauty of his culture with numerous South Korean spectators. “Later we visited Vienna, Austria and participated in the Integration through Education conference hosted by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).”

“Today, we are the only Uzbek cultural centre that still works with

the OSCE in the field of education,” he said.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE Astrid Thors always pays a visit to the South Kazakhstan region whenever their delegation is in Kazakhstan, Khashimzhanov says. According to him, since 1995 our school graduates from Kazakhstan had serious difficulties with enrolling in Uzbek universities. There were days when the Uzbek capital Tashkent used to recruit some of the best professionals in the region, but since gaining independence these opportunities were not available to Kazakhstan’s ethnic Uzbek citizens.

“One of the reasons, for in-

stance, is they use the Latin alphabet; we use Cyrillic. Thanks to the OSCE we are using a bilingual system of education. There are about 100,000 Uzbek school students in the South Kazakhstan region; there are 143 schools [here] and 50 of them are completely Uzbek and the rest are mixed. This year there will be over 4,000 students graduating from schools. So they will have to speak their native tongue, Uzbek, the state language, Kazakh, and Russian to be able to integrate fully into society. With the help of the OSCE our kids are also learning English. I think the more languages one speaks, the more intellectual one becomes

and more understanding towards other cultures,” the leader of the Uzbek community explained.

Uzbeks in Kazakhstan are actively learning the state language in collaboration with other higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, the chairman stressed. “We have the Kazakh language skills contests every year in April. Whoever gets the first places wins grants to enroll in universities – that is, they will study for free. I would like to thank the mass media that helped us hold these contests. Also, I especially thank the South Kazakhstan Pedagogical Institute, the Akhmed Yassawi Kazakh-Turkish University, the Mukhtar Auezov State University, Dostyk Univer-

sity, the Shymkent University, the Saparbayev Institute, Pedagogical and Engineering University and also the Russian-Kazakh University in Astana, which have been a part of this for the last two years. In a span of eight years I gave out certificates for over 60 million tenge (US\$323,284).”

Kazakhs and Uzbeks are brotherly nations, the chairman repeated to conclude the interview, stressing that there are too many evidences of such friendly relations that date back in history. The community is preparing to celebrate the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate and the 20th anniversary of the APK, with celebrations throughout the country on May 15-16.

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CULTURE

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

ATTRAKCION Presents Broadway's "Chicago" in Astana

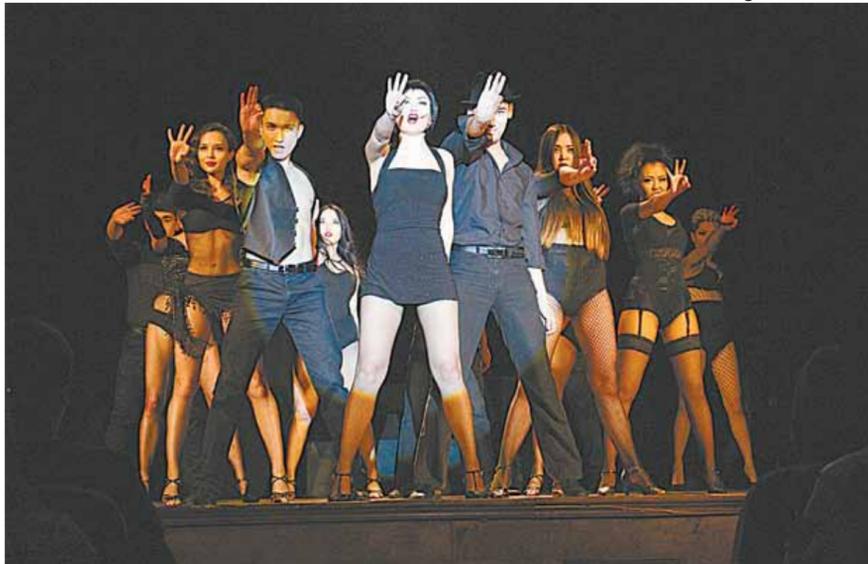
By Lyazzat Shatayeva

ASTANA – Theatre lovers are swinging from the chandeliers as the amateur musical theatre Attraktion showcases its interpretation of "Chicago," Broadway's satirical and sassy musical. Performances will run until March 21.

The public's growing interest in musicals inspired the troupe to produce larger shows this season. The youth theatre secured its bite of the cherry when it obtained amateur rights to stage one, if not the most popular musical, of the day. Attraktion also changed its usual performance venue from Gumilyov Eurasian University to a larger stage at the Historical and Cultural Center of the First President.

The entire "Chicago" cast is composed of actors whose day jobs are unrelated to the performing arts. The capabilities of the young performers, however, undoubtedly give professionals a run for their money. The show's brassy numbers are powered with strong vocals, original choreography and the charismatic presence of the actors.

On stage, ornithologist-environmentalist Zhanna Aksartova transforms into Velma Kelly, a finger-snapping, hip-rolling vaudevilian



and murderess. She opens the show with the famous "All That Jazz," taking the setback to the Jazz Age gangland of the Windy City. Pediatrician and model Evgeniya Klishina delivers a sweet and sexy Roxie Hart, a would-be star who is convinced that "there is no such thing as bad publicity." Yet the biggest credit for the

show's success and public acclaim is rightfully granted to the theatre's Founder and Director Ilyas Daniyarov, who has single-handedly produced the musical. The script translator, lyrics adapter, casting director, choreographer, acting coach, stage director and producer told The Astana Times about the preparation process.

What inspired you to produce "Chicago"?

I saw the musical on Broadway in New York City many years ago. I was fascinated with the audacity of the main characters and actors who played them. I later imagined how the saucy actors and dancers of "Chicago" would sit in a dressing room, roll their eyes and cluck

their tongues at the actors of other shows. This image has stuck with me ever since, inspiring me later to do the show. When I met some of our talented actresses who were fit to the parts in the musical, the whole piece came together. I often draw my inspiration from women and their intricate world.

How long did the production take?

Nearly half a year. All the administrative arrangements, including obtaining the rights to produce the musical, securing the venue and casting started in September last year. The actual rehearsals started in December.

What was the hardest part of the production?

Juggling between the artistic stage directing and administrative management of the entire theatre is pretty challenging. Talent management can get tough, too. However, the hardest part of the production for me is taming my inner critic, curbing that inner voice that interferes with the work process and is hardly ever satisfied with any result.

Who do you think is your audience?

Our audience is anyone who

loves life. A musical is one big celebration of life. I see life as an ongoing musical. Sometimes life is far more comedic and theatrical than any stage performance.

What are your expectations from the shows?

I don't like imposing a certain reaction on a spectator. That's why I never expect a definite audience reaction. I just want to see people come to our shows and live through certain emotions. Hopefully, seeing us play is a pleasant experience for them. We also have so many gifted actors capable of becoming acclaimed artists. I'd like to see them realise their talents in the arts.

What do you consider the biggest achievement of the theatre?

Something that started off as a one-time student performance has evolved into a permanent theatre with a five-year history of regular shows. We have grown professionally. I am proud that we have been able to stay fresh and appealing to the audience. We have found our niche and made a name for ourselves among the amateur theatres. I'm also proud that we have kept our autonomy both creatively and financially.

Astana Opera Hires Prominent Ballerina, Well-Known Conductor as Creative Heads



People's Artist of Russia Altyнай Assylmuratova (l) and Honoured Art Worker of Kazakhstan Alan Buribayev.

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – In an effort to raise its profile at home and abroad, the Astana Opera Theatre management announced changes March 14 in its staff composition. The People's Artist of Russia Altyнай Assylmuratova was appointed as the ballet company's artistic director, while Kazakh honoured art worker Alan Buribayev was named the theatre's principal musician.

Theatre director Toleubek Alpiyev praised the newly-named members of the artistic team.

"We must create leading modern Kazakh culture, which is part of world culture. One of the elements of the achievement of the objective is repatriation of compatriots, workers of culture who are interested in the social-cultural development of the society. Today, we invite such famous persons who achieved success abroad – Altyнай Assylmuratova and Alan Buribayev. The great creative and educational experience of Altyнай Assylmuratova will be very useful for the theatre to improve the professionalism of the artists and the development of Kazakhstan ballet in general," he said, as quoted by Kazinform.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev met Jan. 27 with Minister of Culture Arystanbek Mukhamediuly and Assylmuratova to discuss the state and prospects to develop the cultural sphere and ballet art in particular. The head of state emphasised the importance of the role of the cultural sphere in the state, the significance of improving the conditions for its development and the high potential of Kazakh culture, which is becoming more and more popular in the nation and throughout the world. As-

syilmuratova thanked him for the reception, spoke about her plans for the future and expressed her readiness for cooperation.

Alpiyev noted the importance of complimenting the choreographer with the conductor.

"Also, we invited one of the most talented and popular young conductors in the world, laureate of international contests and honoured art worker of Kazakhstan Alan Buribayev to the position of the principal musician of the Astana Opera Theatre. We hope that his work experience in the position of principal musician and art director of the national symphony orchestra of radio and television of Ireland and principal musician of the Brabant orchestra (the Netherlands) at one time and guest director of the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia gives the opportunity to Astana Opera musicians to progress to the international stage and provides high-quality management," he said.

Buribayev thanked Alpiyev for his kind words.

"I have only positive emotions. I have known the Astana Opera group for a long time and I know its opportunities and potential. I think that we will solve any creative problems," he said.

Assylmuratova added that she is glad to work for the benefit of the Kazakh ballet and its development.

"I saw the ballet company of the Astana Opera at the Nutcracker winter premier, produced by legendary choreographer Yuriy Grigorovich, for the first time. The artists surprised me by their good work and shape. I am pleased to know that it is a young group with very many talented artists and their training is really worthy," she said.

Assylmuratova and Buribayev began in their new posts March 16.

Parliament Develops Plan to Improve Cultural Sphere

By Elmira Kirgelyeva

The Kazakh Parliament is developing a new working concept on cultural policy, according to a recent announcement by Akhan Bizhanov, member of the Mazhilis Committee for Social and Cultural Development and Science

"Scientists, experts and artists were involved in the process. The

concept was approved and is now going to be consistently implemented, as we have already approved the budget. We are also planning to improve the law 'On Culture.' A group of parliamentarians is working on this issue and proposes to introduce a new law in the cultural sphere," said Bizhanov during a briefing at the Central Communications Services under the President.

He also noted that the Cultural Heritage state programme will be improved soon, so that it will correlate with the idea of Mangilik El (Eternal Nation) which is aimed at building a national identity for Kazakhstan, as suggested by President Nursultan Nazarbayev during his Jan. 17, 2014 address to the nation.

Regional centres are also working to improve the cultural sphere.

Additionally, as per request of the President, the country will continue developing its preschool education system.

"About 102 billion tenge (US\$550 million) were allocated to realise the Balapan state programme and the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan is working on further improvement of the programme in accordance with the requirements of the day. In order to continue supporting preschool education, we have been given about 76 billion tenge (US\$409 million); about 20 billion (US\$107 million) tenge were allocated for the construction needs of kindergartens," said Bizhanov.

Japan Spring Arts Festival Offers Astana, Almaty a Glimpse of Japanese Culture

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – The Degdar Humanitarian Fund supported by the Japanese embassy in Kazakhstan made a musical gift to Astana within the bounds of the Japan Spring International Arts Festival in the form of presentations of Japanese musical traditions. Unique Japanese music as well as the creations of Kazakh composers, masterpieces of European classics and Eastern melodies were enjoyed by the recent festival's audience.

"These concerts, held in Almaty and Astana, present people with positive emotions. People go out of a concert hall and their faces are spiritual and happy. As for me, every concert is a holiday for them. All the more so Japanese and Kazakh music are partially similar," said concert participant Yermek Kurmanayev, as quoted by tengrinews.kz.

Timur Urmancheyev, Kazakh honoured art worker, pianist and festival art director was quoted by tengrinews.kz as saying: "We try to invite different musicians from

all over the world. First of all, we want them to come to Astana and, of course, we want to show our young talented young musicians who aren't popular. I hope that this event is a step for them to become famous in the future and gladden the people of our state."

This year, festival organisers were able to include Yamato, a famous Japanese drumming troupe. Yamato was founded in 1993 and has given more than 2,500 performances in 51 countries, creating and presenting original Yamato compositions. Audiences around

the world await their arrival every year in growing numbers. Yamato members say their greatest goal is to send their audiences home after each performance with a new vitality and passion for life and to present the spirit of Japan.

In addition to the concerts, the arts festival also included master classes and workshops for students of Astana and Almaty creative universities.

The festival is open to the public and has been held twice a year in Astana and Almaty since 2011 and is called Japan Spring and Japan Autumn correspondingly.

Kazakh Modern Art Well Received by French Public

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

The exhibition of contemporary painters, sculptors and carpet artists, "Shanyrak, Canopy of Heaven," which was presented in the framework of the international project "Building Bridges between East and West," was held recently in Cannes.

According to an interview given by the Project Manager of the exhibition Larisa Inzhudzhyan to the "Liter" newspaper, the arts of Goulaifourous Ismailova, Marat Bekeyev, Edouard Kazarian and Andrey Noda have attracted much interest.

The exhibition was held in the Central Exhibition Hall Miramar on the famous Croisette Boulevard, where according to artists every picture is a masterpiece. And since Cannes is a centre of tourism and international festivals, the works

of art by Kazakh painters and artists gained attention from art lovers from around the world.

According to Inzhudzhyan, this large-scale international project is based on the main principle of art, which is the preservation and transmission of human traditions and the raising of cultural cooperation to a higher level. She stated that an exhibition of this scale devoted to the contemporary art of Kazakhstan has never taken place before on the Cote d'Azur. This is why the opening day of the exhibition has been called an extraordinary event in the history of Franco-Kazakh relations by local journalists.

The exhibition has stirred as much enthusiasm among critics as it has among audiences. Art lovers had an opportunity to address their questions to artist Marat Bekeyev and sculptor Edouard Kazarian. The artists were asked about tech-

niques used in the showcased pieces as well as the thoughts and ideas reflected in their works.

Initiated by the MP Land Ismet public funds and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, this project was well

received by the French public. In his opening speech, Mayor of Cannes David Lisnard said that he is a fan of Kazakh art. Speaking of the idea of the project at the opening day, he said: "Kazakhstan is represented in Cannes as a young, dynamically developing country looking into the future. Therefore, the compositional focus of the exhibition is clear. It is made on the achievements in the field of fine art."

He also expressed his desire to present more Kazakh artists to the French public.



FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Culinary Arts in Kazakhstan Heating Up as Service Sector Grows

Continued from Page B1

Machshinskaya would agree. "Our association engages in a lot of work to enhance the prestige of the profession of chef in the country, especially among young people. The prestige and involvement of young talent in the profession are pressing challenges for food and hospitality industry," she said.

The National Culinary Association works with colleges to train cooking and catering specialists in Kokshetau, Schuchinsk, Karaganda and Astana. "The main problem of most educational institutions is that they do not consider training for the hospitality industry as a whole," Machshinskaya commented. But

hospitality is a powerful industry now, she said, and includes a huge range of activities, from tourism and entertainment to hotel services, catering, sightseeing, event planning and more. "Educational institutions should be focused on precise training for the industry as a whole; then the level of training would be much higher," Machshinskaya said.

"Since the culture of food in Kazakhstan and especially in Astana was born only recently, there is still a lot of space for improvement," Rixos President Executive Chef Oreste Mancini told The Astana Times on March 12. Rixos works with the College of Service and Food Service Professional Lyceum No. 2, he explained. "There are a lot of young

cooks that join us every year, but unfortunately usually the school can give only basic knowledge and the rest is hard work and experience not only in Kazakhstan but worldwide. I put a lot of effort into training all my staff in all aspects of kitchen operations," he said.

Of course, as restaurants and hotels open in the Kazakh capital, they provide opportunities for young Kazakh chefs to work in demanding kitchens with international staff. "At the moment, there are huge opportunities for young cooks who want to learn to be better and get jobs in the best places in the city, since they are actively seeking staff," said Mancini, who has worked in Astana since October 2014.

With Kazakhstan increasing its contact with the rest of the world almost daily through new flights, new international events and a growing tourist industry, an increased mutual interest in food seems inevitable and aspiring professionals aren't the only ones interested in building their skills in the kitchen. As new ingredients become available, home cooks in the country are also keen to expand their culinary horizons.

"Yes, indeed, cooking is becoming more popular," Co-director of Almaty's Compote Cooking Studio Zau Abisheva told The Astana Times on March 6. "We can now purchase many exotic products, so preparing some exotic meals is now possible. Moreover, people don't just want to go to restaurants, they also want to understand what they eat. All this enhances our interest in cooking."

Compote opened in September 2012. "The idea was to establish a useful and attractive place for citizens who would like to learn something new and enhance their cooking knowledge during workshops with the participation of various chefs and cooks. It was high time, as the interest for cooking was pretty high, but no experts could offer their skills," Abisheva said.

Compote mostly offers one-day workshops on cuisines ranging from Italian to Japanese, Abisheva said, plus confectionery classes, kids' classes, courses for more advanced chefs, wine tastings and lectures. They also do team building activities, parties and other events, which all in all have drawn about 5,000 participants, Abisheva said. "Our classes are meant only



Compote Cooking Studio in Almaty

for amateurs. Yes, our workshops with famous chefs can be interesting for professionals, but our main audience unites people who just like cooking."

For the three years they've been in business, "the culinary arts have become more popular, but no dramatic changes can be mentioned. It is changing slightly and gradually," the co-director said.

The celebrity chef craze sweeping North America and Europe doesn't seem to have reached Kazakhstan yet. "Unfortunately, there are no such trends in Kazakhstan yet – if the cook has a name, it is only in professional circles, among colleagues," Machshinskaya said. "Of course, restaurateurs and chefs aspire to this – to organise workshops to share experiences, professional communication, make a name for themselves – but it is more common in Almaty, [and] Astana, where the range of consumers is large enough."

While Abisheva notes that lo-

cal food traditions are "simple and modest," Machshinskaya also pointed out that Kazakhstan, as a multicultural nation, is home to a huge variety of "national" food. "The President gave an entire street for restaurants of national cuisines in Astana: Kazakh, Uzbek, Russian, Georgian, Italian, Chinese, Korean. This is a great idea for a country where more than 130 nationalities live," she said.

The National Culinary Association is working on a framework for the development of the hospitality industry in Kazakhstan and forming policy in the education and development of professional hospitality staff, among other activities. They also host festivals of national food in Kazakhstan and represent the country in international culinary competitions. "It helps not only to share experiences, but also to acquaint the world with the hospitality of the Kazakh people and with the traditions of national cuisine," Machshinskaya said.



Compote Cooking Studio in Almaty

Pension Reform Bill Likely to be Approved by Mazhilis

By Yelden Sarybay

A bill to reform Kazakhstan's pension system that takes into consideration the years a pensioner has worked is expected to be approved by year's end, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Development Svetlana Zhakupova said in a Central Communications Service press conference on March 3.

"The bill has already been drafted and is under consideration by the government. In April, we plan to take it to the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament). Consequently, after it is considered by members, it can be adopted by the end of this year," Zhakupova said.

The deputy minister stressed that the document regulates the complete transformation of basic pension payments, which today does not take into account a pensioner's work experience and is given without regard to their current income and wages.

"Starting July 1, 2017, basic pension payments will be given depending on the length of the prior employment's insurance, which is calculated by participa-

tion in the pension system and transferring pension contributions. If a person has worked 10 years or less, they will be given a basic pension of 50 percent of the subsistence minimum. For each year over 10 ten years of experience, they will be given an additional 2 percent. Accordingly, if the length of their work experience is equal to 20 years, the base payment will be 70 percent of the subsistence minimum. The most, or the equivalent of the minimum wage, will be given to pensioners who have 35 or more years work experience," Zhakupova explained.

The bill also takes into account a conditional savings system in which employers make mandatory contributions of 5 percent of employee salaries.

"Employers will transfer 5 percent of the payroll for each employee starting from Jan. 1, 2018. These contributions will be accumulated in a Unified Accumulative Pension Fund. They cannot be inherited and will be distributed among the participants of the pension system. Five years after the introduction of the conditional saving system,

payments will begin on Jan. 1, 2023," she said.

At the end of the briefing, Zhakupova informed that in 2015, a onetime financial assistance payment will be given to veterans and those disabled during WWII, persons related to them, home front workers and other Kazakhstan citizens who contributed to victory in the war. For this purpose the state set aside a budget of 5.69 billion tenge (US\$30.67 million).

The scheme provides for the following pay-outs of one-time financial assistance: 100,000 tenge (US\$539) for veterans and those disabled during WWII; 70,000 tenge (US\$377.32) to persons related to the veterans and those disabled during WWII and those who contributed to the victory in the war; 30,000 tenge (US\$161.71) to parents, spouses of soldiers killed during the Second World War, the residents of besieged Leningrad and underage prisoners of fascist concentration camps, ghettos and other places of detention; 25,000 tenge (US\$134.76) to home front workers and the wives of deceased disabled persons during WWII and persons related to them.

Kazakh Research Institute Upgrades Eye Care at New Astana Branch

By Marina Parkhomenko

The Kazakh Research Institute announced recently that it has expanded its range of diagnostic and treatment services at its recently opened Astana branch and has purchased 400 million tenge (US\$2.2 million) worth of modern equipment to increase its utilisation of innovative technologies in medical treatment.

The improved treatment and equipment will allow vitreoretinal surgery, which is one of the most difficult types of eye surgeries and had previously only been available in Almaty, to now be available in Astana through a free medical care programme.

The capital city now has its own specialised laser centre equipped with a femtosecond laser used for refractive surgery anomalies

treatment, such as myopia, hyperopia and astigmatism.

"Today, we are able to provide high-tech medical assistance and make it available for every citizen of the country. We have a highly qualified staff, as we invited seven leading surgeons from Almaty to Astana, and innovative equipment and we are ready to realise what has been planned," said Chairman of the Board of the Kazakh Research Institute Tursungul Botabekova.

The institute conducts around 35,000 consultations, 13,000 operations and 5,000 laser surgeries every year. After the acquisition of new equipment, these figures are expected to grow significantly. The structure of the branch includes adult and children's departments, day care, a consultative and diagnostic department, a laser centre and a laboratory for

ophthalmologists training courses.

The new institute branch will also become a platform for coming scientific forums and a meeting organised for the Kazakhstan Association of Ophthalmologists on diabetic retinal lesions was held in the frames of the opening ceremony of the branch. According to Eduardo Midenia of Italy, who is a member of the ophthalmologists association as well as a professor and secretary general of the European College of Ophthalmologists, the institute's equipment meets international standards and the institute has professionals capable of using the equipment. He praised the efforts of the branch for its work in pediatric retinopathy, noting that only a nation that cares about the health of its children may have a future.

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SOCIETY

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Medical, Social Innovations Improve Quality of Life in Mukur Village in East Kazakhstan



Semey Deputy Mayor Zaufresh Issabayeva cuts the ribbon on a new care centre in Mukur district.



Mukur district's new care centre, funded by the UNDP.

By Meiramgul Beisenova

"Before, we could only dream of such luxuries. We thought that these kind of centres were privileges only enjoyed by city dwellers, but now we have a centre right here in Mukur," said Mukur village resident Kulzipa Daulenova.

The East Kazakhstan region is home to more than 57,000 disabled people, including more than 10,000 in Semey who need considerably more assistance in their integration into society than they are currently receiving. There are 2,928 people living in Mukur village, including 1,406 pensioners, 30 persons with disabilities and 12 World War II veterans. Mukur is a test site for the best global practices in improving the lives of older persons and persons with

disabilities in rural areas after they are successfully tested in the city of Semey.

"There are several problems that increase the need for new and alternative forms of health and social care provisions for local residents. Among them is the aging population and related mental and physical health issues. In addition, we can see an increase in the number of relatively young people with disabilities among residents affected by the nuclear tests at the former Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site. Only last year, 12 projects were implemented in this area, totaling 13 million tenge (US\$70,102) as part of a joint UN programme in East Kazakhstan," said Rauan Kaliyev, manager of the UNDP Department for Improving Access to Social and Economic Services.

The construction of a daycare centre to serve Mukur residents with disabilities is long overdue and has not been addressed because of inadequate funding. The new centre opened with financial support from the UNDP as part of a Nur Kala grant project. There are bikes, oxygen concentrators and other equipment for indoor activities. According to health experts, the use of oxygen concentrators is one of the most efficient and cost-effective ways to administer oxygen therapy for patients with chronic respiratory failure at home. Oxygen concentrators can reduce the length of hospital stays, allowing patients to continue treatment at home. They are also the only way to extend the lives of patients with severe respiratory failure. Occupational therapy is the treatment

of people with specific activities aimed at restoring their maximum level of function and independence in all aspects of life. As shown by the most effective social services in the UK, this type of therapy actively restores and preserves human health. The akimat (administration) of the Mukur rural district, in considering the importance of the project, provided a separate room to serve as the centre's office.

The first day care centre for the elderly and persons with disabilities in Semey was opened two years ago through another grant project via a local medical and social institution. The centre can provide services to up to 350 people a year. Visitors to the centre have noted a significant improvement in the quality of social services received in Semey. For

their convenience, there is a sensory room with modern massage equipment. The centre also raises public awareness about healthy lifestyle issues and provides psychological support. According to them, all these dimensions of the UN programme have contributed to the integration of the disabled into society, recovery of their personal and social standing, motivation to live long lives and their mental health.

Based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UNDP also supports initiatives that provide opportunities to disabled children in Eastern Kazakhstan. Taking into account the needs of children in Semey, the UNDP supported the establishment of remedial (correctional) secondary school classes at schools No. 42

and No. 20 by purchasing special equipment and furniture.

Semey Deputy Mayor for Social Issues Zaufresh Issabayeva participated in the opening of these two projects totaling 2.4 million tenge (US\$12,947) to support socially vulnerable segments of the population in Mukur and Semey on Feb. 13. Deputy Head of the Semey Education Department Yerzhan Yestayev thanked the UNDP for paying attention to people with disabilities and creating healthy conditions for classes to be held in on behalf of parents. Issabayeva asked that support for projects aimed at creating a barrier free society be continued.

The author is a communication specialist with the UN Joint Programme in East Kazakhstan.

Astana, Kostanai Rated Nation's Top Urban Hospitals

By Kseniya Voronina

A new report shows that Astana's city hospital is the country's highest rated multidisciplinary medical institution followed by Kostanai city hospital and Rudny city hospital. Tekeli hospital of the Almaty region was rated lowest in this category.

The report was compiled by the National Centre for Health Development, which rated 94 multidisciplinary medical institutions in the country. The institutions were rated on criteria such as mortality rates, quality of care and patient satisfaction, according to the centre's press service.

Among regional diversified hospitals for adults, according to the report, Kyzylorda Regional Medical Centre took first place followed by regional hospitals in Kostanai and Atyrau.

Among regional children's multidisciplinary hospitals, the regional children's hospital of the Mangistau region was rated number one. In second place was the regional children's multidisciplinary hospital of the Western Kazakhstan region, the third was the regional children's hospital of the Karaganda region. The Zhambyl Regional Hospital was rated lowest in this category.

The leader among urban children's hospitals were the Temir-

tau children's hospital of the Karaganda region, city children's hospital No. 2 of Almaty and Shymkent city children's hospital No. 1 of the South Kazakhstan region.

The study also found that Kazakhstan has 49 urban and 15 regional medical institutions, as well as 15 specialised children's hospitals in outlying areas and 15 specialised children's hospitals in the nation's cities. The National Centre for Health Development annually evaluates medical institutions in the country to better inform the public about its medical care choices as well as to quantify the state of management of the institutions.

Almaty Makes Multiple Upgrades to City's Public Transportation System

By Julia Rutz

Almaty city public transport, ambulance and emergency, as well as engineering vehicles will get special traffic lanes by 2017, reported TV channel Almaty.

According to the channel's report, the Kazakhstan Development Bank is ready to provide a loan to the city administration within the national campaign "Energy Efficient Kazakhstan." This measure will also support the Sustainable Transport programme, aimed at improving the city's urban infrastructure and passengers' transportation system.

The city is also planning to build dedicated bike lanes and establish a light rail transit line in Almaty, which will travel at 26 kilometres per hour. Earlier, officials with the sustainable transport programme concluded that buses travel during rush hour at 13.8 kilometres per hour and that loading and unloading of bus passengers takes about 30 percent of the time of all trips.

Since Feb. 27, four city trolley buses with numbers 1263, 1212, 1202, 1243 as well as 212 streetcars have been equipped with free Wi-Fi, according to AlmatyElectroTrans press secretary Gaukhar Nokerbekova.

"If the first phase of the pilot project goes successfully, all city trolley buses will be equipped with free Wi-Fi. We are also planning to provide the same service for buses, however, the terms have not been defined yet," said Nokerbekova.

Thus, the southern capital has become the latest city to provide Wi-Fi for public transport. The first city was Petropavlovsk in northern Kazakhstan, which added Wi-Fi in 2013. Petropavlovsk was also the first to offer innovative heated bus shelters to keep travelers more comfortable during northern Kazakhstan's harsh winters.

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TOURISM

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Kazakhstan Flags to be Carried to North Pole



The expedition team that will carry Kazakhstan's flag to the North Pole with supporters on March 19 in Astana.

By Nurlan Meirmanov

ASTANA – The first Kazakhstan ski expedition to the North Pole will carry three flags – the national flag, the flag of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK) which marks its 20th anniversary this year, and the flag designed

specifically as part of the country's bid to win a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2017–2018.

The expedition is being organised by the Kazakh Geographical Society (KazGeo), with support from the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK), the Kazakh Foreign Ministry and Kazakhstan

Bloggers' Alliance. The news was announced by the three organisations at a March 19 press conference held in Astana.

"One of the expedition's tasks is to popularise the assembly values abroad," said APK Deputy Chairman Yeraly Tugzhanov. KazGeo announced their project was dedicated to the 20th anniversary

of APK, as well as to support the country's bid for the UN Security Council seat.

Chairman of the Kazakh Foreign Ministry's Committee for International Information Roman Vassilenko welcomed the KazGeo project. He noted that in 2013, President Nursultan Nazarbayev decided that the nation's strength-

ened position within the international community would allow its contribution to regional and global security to move to a new level through its bid for the UN seat. Should the seat be granted, Astana will have the opportunity to promote its international initiatives from this important platform, where decisions are made that in-

fluence global peace and security, he noted.

At the end of the press conference, the expedition organisers were presented with the flags of Kazakhstan and the APK, as well as the flag specially designed for the UN bid. The team plans to fly from Almaty to Oslo on March 31 and then to Longyearbyen on the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. There they will finish preparations for the expedition, train in a base camp and conduct final equipment checks. The team will fly five days later to an ice runaway, where the ski expedition will kick off some 200 kilometres from the North Pole.

The team estimates it will take seven to twelve days to reach its destination, with the need to surpass ice faults and ice pressure ridges (hummocks). The organisers hope that the expedition will help to highlight the achievements and core values celebrated by Kazakhstan as the country marks 550 years of nationhood, 70 years since the defeat of Nazism in the Second World War and 20 years of APK and the Constitution.

Additionally, the expedition will have a scientific component as Kazakh researchers will be taking DNA samples from residents in Norway for later study to determine the existence of common roots of the Norwegians and people in central Eurasia.

Earlier this year, Norwegian scholars travelled to various cities in Kazakhstan to collect DNA samples as part of a wider multinational research project also involving a leading Danish laboratory.

Astana Making "Excellent" Progress on EXPO 2017, BIE Chief Says

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – Secretary General of the International Expositions Bureau (BIE) Vicente Loscertales said Astana was making "excellent" progress in preparations for EXPO 2017 during a March 19 press conference in the Kazakh capital's Central Communications Service. Loscertales was in town for a two-day visit to meet with officials and assess the country's progress on the multi-year project.

"The management of the expo site is a model for future expos and for future construction projects," Loscertales said at the press conference, in which First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commissioner of EXPO 2017 Rapol Zhoshybayev and Chairman of the Board of the Astana EXPO 2017 National Company Talgat Yermegiyayev also participated. "I am convinced that we are going to be not only within the schedule that was proposed, but also that we are going to be in certain aspects a little bit ahead of schedule."

Due to belt-tightening across the board, the budget for the expo has been cut, Yermegiyayev confirmed in response to questions after Loscertales's remarks. "The National Budget Commission has cut the budget of the exhibition by 10 billion tenge [US\$53.8 million], of which 7 billion tenge [US\$37.6 million] comes from construction and 3 billion tenge [US\$16.1 million] [were earmarked] for public relations and entertainment," he said. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev announced that the country would enter 'savings mode' in February and called for a number of large scale budget cuts, including to EXPO 2017.

However, Loscertales said that participation was on schedule and said he expected participation targets for 2015 to be met. Zhoshybayev noted that 19 countries had confirmed their participation in the event so far and that more were expected to join over the course of the year. With the launch of EXPO 2015 in Milan will come an opportunity for Kazakhstan to drum up interest in its own expo, Loscertales said, saying Kazakhstan's pavilion would be an important mechanism



BIE Secretary General Vicente Loscertales (c) briefs the press on March 19, with the chairman of the board of Astana EXPO 2017 and the EXPO 2017 national commissioner.

for promoting the country, the capital and the expo.

Zhoshybayev said the expo would be an engine driving tourism to Kazakhstan, and said the state expects to receive about 5 million visitors to EXPO 2017. He said he had recently met with Secretary General of the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Taleb Rifai, who praised Kazakhstan's tourism potential and is now considering holding a UNWTO event in Astana in 2017. Talks have also been held with ministers of tourism in other countries, migration and immigration reforms are being considered and communication with four operators in key countries including China, Germany, Russia, the U.K., France, Japan and other countries is open, Zhoshybayev reported.

The expo's legal framework, which must be approved by the Kazakh government and the BIE, is "advancing," Loscertales said. "We have made progress toward that and we hope that this framework will be prepared for the end of this year," he said. He had discussed legal issues with Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov earlier in the day, Loscertales said, commending Massimov for his ongoing support for EXPO 2017.

Loscertales was also given an opportunity to check on the thematic pavilions. He noted that all the project tenders have been won and now it only remains to see detailed plans in a few months' time. The secretary general said the design of the thematic pavilions also

seemed to be advancing well. "The ideas and the way they are developing, I found that very positive and very attractive for the visitors," Loscertales said of the plans he had seen.

The secretary general counselled maintaining a balance of science and entertainment, and for Kazakhstan to keep "strict control" over the quality of the content and the attractiveness of the presentation, in response to requests for advice. "Expos need to have a serious and interesting theme, but they also need to be entertaining. ... My advice now is to keep a good balance between quality of the concept and attractiveness of the presentation," he said.

During a meeting with Mayor of Astana Adilbek Zhaksybekov before the press conference, the BIE secretary general discussed the city's plans for new transport infrastructure for the event, including new roads, bus stations, rail way stations, parking areas and a new airport terminal. The mayor also announced plans to build a new 50 megawatt solar power plant, which is scheduled to be put into operation in the first quarter of 2016. Apartments, hotels and entertainment venues are also slated to be built. At the press conference, Loscertales thanked the mayor for his spirit of openness and cooperation on the project.

"Since I arrived, my first impression is of the rapid evolution of the city," Loscertales said to open the press conference. "The expo site has progressed ... in a very efficient and impressive manner."



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



FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

First Kazakhstan Formula 3 Racer Completes Testing in Malaysia



By Dmitry Lee

The first ever Formula 3 race car from Kazakhstan and the first ever female Formula 3 racer from there, Lyubov Andreyeva, continue to impress the world of racing and represent Kazakhstan in another elite world championship, having successfully completed the Sepang test drive on March 17 and getting noticed by the Formula BMW Pacific 2008 champion Ross Jamison.

"This was a pre-season test for Lyubov. [We chose] Sepang, as many European pilots do, because it's a popular racing series and because of the good weather

conditions and high-quality of the track. The cars are good and the people are great too," Andreyeva's manager Daniil Andreyev said in an interview with the Astana Times.

"We want to win the upcoming Formula 3 Masters Russia season this year that will start in April. It will have nine stages and we are determined to win the championship," Andreyev stressed.

"The aim for the second day in the car was to lap the circuit in less than 2 minutes and 26 seconds. [Andreyeva] made big gains during the morning sessions, constantly working with [Jamison] to improve her driving. During the third heat, she completed the track

in 2:27.0 and in the final session, she rounded the circuit in 2:25.5, breaking her target in the process. Lyubov has great motivation and focus and completed two days of testing without making any mistakes. The team can see her basic talent and understand the areas that she requires coaching in, an Asia Cup Series recommendation report stated.

The Asia Cup Series, formerly known as the BMW Formula Talent Cup, is a single-seat junior Formula series, where young, talented drivers are discovered and then recruited by the world's best racing franchises. Among the numerous racers was current Formula 1 racer Nico Rosberg.

Kazakh Skater Secures Country's First World Cup Podium in 15 years



By Dmitry Lee

Kazakh speed skater Yekaterina Aidova from Karaganda secured third position and took bronze during the International

AIDOVA: "We hadn't won a medal in 15 years at World Cups? I didn't know that. Now I am even more delighted."

Skating Union (ISU) World Cup finals in Erfurt, Germany, March 21-22.

Aidova finished the 500-metre

event behind Heather Richardson and Brittany Bowe of the U.S.

Aidova won the first podium for Kazakhstan since the 2000-2001 season, according to the zakon.kz website that inter-

viewed the skater right after the event.

"Seriously? We hadn't won a medal in 15 years at World Cups? I didn't know that. Now I

am even more delighted. I don't know what history pages it will go into, but this day was happier than all other at the World Cups," Aidova said.

The Kazakh skater finished fourth four times during the Astana World Cup stage in front of her home crowd and said that falling just short of a podium finish helped her stay motivated to break her own record to get on the podium this time in the finals.

In the men's competition, top Kazakh skater Denis Kuzin pulled out of the event citing health reasons and saying that his season had ended.

Kazakh Journalists Win Int'l Sports Journalism Awards in Moscow

By Damir Serikbayev

Vice President of the Association of Sports Press of Kazakhstan Mikhail Vasilyev won the award for the best foreign television story at the recent fourth Energy of Victories sports journalist competition in Moscow. The competition was sponsored by Gazprom.

The prize for the best photograph among foreign photojournalists went to Kazakh Stanislav Filippov, whose works have been published by global news agencies, such as Agence France-Presse and RIA Novosti.

The jury of the contest consisted

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of prominent representatives of the sports press, such as Nikolai Dolgoplov, Igor Rabiner and Andrei Golovanov. Chairman of the jury was popular Russian television commentator Viktor Gusev.

Vasilyev presented a story, which was broadcast in the framework of the television programme

Fizkult-revue about athlete Svetlana Makeyeva.

"This work is very humane," said Gusev.

In his words, the story is notable for its heroine. She is gentle, but at the same time strong. Although, there were many works about athletes with disabilities, this work stood out for its drama.

Vasilyev noted that he was told about the award on his birthday and it was a nice gift for him.

Filippov said he was surprised that his work was acknowledged by a distinguished jury. "I have never participated in any international competitions, so I wanted to determine my professional level, whether I can compete with photographers from other countries," Filippov said.

Russian and foreign Russian-speaking media journalists took part in the contest. Out of 400 works submitted, 85 were selected for the final round of judging.



Combat Sports Confederation to Intensify Efforts for 2016 Olympics

By Kseniya Voronina

Confederation of Combat Sports and Powerlifting Chairman Timur Kulibayev directed members of the confederation during a March 12 confederation meeting to intensify their preparations for the 2016 Olympic Games.

New Confederation Director General Daniar Abulgazin was also introduced at the meeting. He took the position after the resignation of Saken MUSAIBEKOV, who was appointed by governmental decree to the position of Vice-Minister of Culture and Sports of Kazakhstan.

The confederation meeting addressed training quality, general preparations of the national team for the Olympics as well as improving judicial qualifications and the participation of Kazakh judges as part of the judicial delegation at the 2016 Olympic Games. Confederation members also discussed developing international cooperation and improving the English language skills of judges, coaches and athletes.



Timur Kulibayev

The confederation also pays special attention to the prevention and detection of illicit use of drugs by athletes. Therefore, the current year was declared the "Year of Sport Medicine Development and the Fight against Doping." The president of the confederation directed that cutting-edge science be used in that effort.

In August, Kazakhstan will host a World Judo Championship in Astana. In this regard, the Judo Federation of Kazakhstan was given precise instructions on the preparation and organization of the upcoming event.

Canada, Kazakhstan Practice Diplomacy on Ice with Friendly Hockey Match

By Arsen Dilim

ASTANA – Kazakhstan and Canada recently carried out a little diplomacy on ice when members of the Astana city administration and the Canadian embassy in Astana met on the ice at the Kazakhstan Sports Palace for a hockey match to commemorate the anniversary of the establishment of Kazakh-Canadian diplomatic relations.

At the beginning of the match, the players were greeted by the head of the Sports Department of Astana Berik Marzhykpayev and Ambassador of Canada to Kazakhstan Shawn Steil.

The Astana city administration team dominated the match early, pulling to a 7:0 lead after the first period. The Astana team also had a little help in the form of the play of Barys professional hockey team General Manager and former professional hockey player Nurlan Orazbayev. The Canadians were able to make it a match, however, scoring five unanswered goals in the second period.

But with home ice advantage and the skills of a former professional player, the home team ultimately prevailed 10:7. Relations between the two cold-weather nations are not reported to have suffered.



Canadian and Kazakh government workers face off on the ice in Astana.

CAPITAL

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Kazakh Restaurateurs Trending with “Made In Kazakhstan” Foodstuffs



Chefs and staff at Astana's Radisson Hotel



Guests at Astana's Dorogaya Ya Perezvonyu (Darling, I'll Call Back) restaurant. Photograph: pppz.kz

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“The support of domestic producers is an important contribution to the development of our state's economy. We are always honest with our guests and we consider that the sale of imported products under the pretense of domestic products not only limits consumers' rights for free choice, but it is also a cheat. A guest must always get the best, because when he lives in a hotel, he gets impressions about the state of where he is living. This is an outstanding opportunity for our domestic producers to demonstrate the wealth of Kazakhstan,” he said.

Although chefs want to use Kazakh products, the “Made in Kazakhstan” promotion can be limited by a lack of particular items. “I consider that limitation or prohibition could negatively affect my business, because there is no replacement for some imported products. So such limitation or prohibition can be legal only if we have any alternatives for such imported products,” said Akhunov.

“Kazakhstan foodstuffs are high quality and our producers don't use chemicals and genetically modified organisms, even if they aren't always cheaper than imported ones. The usage of imported products also leads to difficulties with

timely delivery and freshness,” he added.

Radisson Hotel chief cook Sunil Gopal noted he is proud of the food he can prepare in his restaurant using local products.

“First of all, it is a reasoned choice of fresh foodstuffs for the representatives of the restaurant-hotel business. Guests must always get high-quality and fresh products. Patriotism manifests itself exactly in the support of domestic producers,” he said in an interview with The Astana Times on March. 19.

“Touring the culture and customs of a state when you arrive for the first time always starts with its traditional cuisine. Ka-

zakhstan always had a reputation for its meat delicacies, fruits and wheat. Many foreign guests leave the state thrilled to bits because of the variety of natural products that are produced in Kazakhstan. Many of them admit that bread and flour products are the most delicious in this country thanks to the special climate and conditions in which the wheat is grown. There is no guest who is indifferent to our meat delicacies. We really have foodstuffs to be proud of and we gladly support domestic producers,” Gopal added.

Akhunov provided insight into his menu.

“In our restaurant we use up to 90 percent of products manufac-

ured by Kazakhstan producers. But of course this ratio depends on the menu. Our restaurant gives the opportunity to use foodstuffs made in Kazakhstan. For example, German small sausages on our menu are made in Kazakhstan and they are made of Pavlodar meat. But we almost never purchase Kazakhstan cheese, [we] use imported ones, because Kazakhstan producers don't manufacture some sorts of cheese we need according to our recipes. For example, mozzarella cheese. I really don't know why our producers don't manufacture it, because it is very popular and every fourth client wants to eat a salad with this cheese. If any Kazakhstan produc-

er starts production of this sort of cheese, we will be glad to purchase it,” he said.

Radisson Public Relations Coordinator Anastassiya Kazantseva noted that using local items is a perfect way to publicise the excellence of Kazakh products.

“We came in contact with many domestic producers of foodstuffs during the years of our hotel's operation. Test by experience and time is the best advertisement of quality and complete conformance to all standards for us. Thanks to such cooperation, our guests get only the best,” she said in an interview with The Astana Times on March. 19.

Asian Country Governors, Mayors Briefed on Astana Transportation Management Progress

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

Bangkok was the site of the third Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) for governors and mayors March 11-13. This year's theme, “ASEM Goes Local: Innovation and Regeneration,” focused on the four major topics of disaster management, response to environmental problems, traffic and transport management, as well as tourism management and cultural diversity.

In his opening speech, Bangkok Governor Sukumband Paribatra stressed the importance of cooperation between Asia and Europe in the context of globalisation and current geopolitical events. He also separately welcomed the delegation from Astana, a new member of ASEM.

During the forum, the Kazakh representatives informed international participants about current development trends in Astana and the achievements of the young capital.

A hot topic of discussion was the sphere of transport and traffic management. In this context, the Kazakh delegation presented details about the new Astana transport system project, which consists of three complementary and integrated high-tech systems: light rail transit (LRT), bus rapid transit (BRT) and intelligent transport system. A portion of the 21-kilometre LRT will join Astana International Airport, the exhibition area for EXPO 2017 and a new railway station. An electronic ticketing system will soon be introduced, which will greatly enhance

the efficiency of urban transport in the capital, the delegation reported.

According to the statement of the Akimat (town council), due to preparations for the international exhibition, the organisation of Astana's public transport will significantly change by 2017.

Foreign delegates expressed the intention to expand cooperation in the structure of ASEM, both at the intergovernmental and inter-regional levels.

In the framework of the forum, the Kazakh delegation also held a bilateral meeting with Paribatra, during which the sides discussed the current state of cooperation between Astana and Bangkok and agreed to further develop and deepen the partnership between the capitals.

Capital's Police Outreach Campaign Seeks to Prevent Teen Crime

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – Employees of the Astana Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) Office for Administrative Police together with representatives of state agencies, social workers and school psychologists recently launched a campaign allowing teens to visit with police officers in an effort to steer teens away from crime, according to an Astana city administration press release.

The two-day campaign called

“Teenager – Law – Security” was launched on March 16 and sought to prevent juvenile delinquency, increase legal literacy and teach safe driving techniques.

High school and college students were able to get acquainted with the work of police and visit the DIA museum, where they learned about the history of the department. They were also able to receive answers to legal questions from the police officers.

Highway patrol police officers also told the young people about their work, as well as demonstrated their equipment and patrol

cars equipped with digital video recorders (DVRs).

DIA Cynological Service Centre search dogs also demonstrated their skills to the students.

Students also visited special institutions for teenagers who have broken the law. According to Senior Inspector on Special Assignments of Astana DIA Larissa Krasnikova, this method offers positive results because the strict appearance of the guards, conditions and atmosphere of such institutions demonstrate the consequences of violating the law.

Astana Symposium Examines Kazakhstan's New Civil Service Model

By Serik Krymbekov

ASTANA – The Kazakh Agency on Civil Service Affairs and Anti-Corruption with the support of the Regional Hub of Civil Service organised a March 13 symposium concerning the country's civil service model. The symposium was held in the Academy of Public Administration and included participation of leading international experts and representatives of authorised civil service bodies.

In his opening remarks, agency Deputy Chairman Sayan Akhmetzhanov noted that during the Nur Otan Party's 16th Congress, the head of state determined the formation of modern, professional and autonomous state apparatus, ensuring qualitative implementation of economic programmes and provision of public services as a primary institutional reform. He also stressed that the policy of the agency is aimed at professionalising the state apparatus on the basis of meritocracy principles and talent management

to provide for the country's sustainable growth and stability.

Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Regional hub of Civil Service in Astana Alikhan Baimenov said that “international experts note that as of today, Kazakhstan is considered to be a recognised leader in the field of civil service reform. Development of civil service is a prime example of consistent and progressive reform based on the strategic vision and political will of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of our state.”

In his presentation, Maximilian Foedinger, key expert of the European Union project Civil Service Reform and Modernisation of the Government of Kazakhstan (CSR), spoke about the main results of civil service reform implemented in the country and shared his views on improving its civil service model.

Additional reports were delivered by Associate Professor Rex Feyser (USA), CIVICA Asia-Pacific General Manager Sukhvinder Singh Chopra (Singapore) and National Union of Human Resource Management CEO Alexander Turchinov (Russia).



Participants at the March 13 symposium on Kazakhstan's civil service model.

