



Astana, Moscow Advance Ties, Plans to Launch EEU on Jan. 1

By Yulia Mager

MOSCOW – Presidents of Kazakhstan and Russia Nursultan Nazarbayev and Vladimir Putin exchanged views on the most pressing issues on the regional and international agendas, discussed bilateral cooperation, as well as the course of the Eurasian integration during their meeting in Moscow on Dec. 22.

Nazarbayev stressed that they first met with Putin 15 years ago as he wished his Russian counterpart success in leading his country.

“This year, we signed the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) treaty in Astana. The treaty will enter into force. Despite all the challenges we should support this organisation and make it viable and interesting for all,” he said.

In turn, the Russian leader drew attention to key prospects of bilateral relations and plans for further integration.

The heads of state signed a protocol on the exchange of ratification documents for the Treaty between Kazakhstan and Russia on Good-Neighbourliness and Alliance in the 21st Century signed in November 2013.

On Dec. 23, Moscow hosted the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) summit with the participation of the presidents of Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

On the same day, the leaders of Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus as well as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan also met in the Kremlin in the format of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council on the eve of the entry into force of the EEU on Jan. 1, 2015.

Kazakh President Visits Kiev to Re-boost Ties, Seek Solutions to Conflict in Eastern Ukraine



President Nursultan Nazarbayev (l) met with President Petro Poroshenko in Kiev on Dec. 22 to re-boost bilateral trade that shrank one-third this year because of the conflict in eastern Kazakhstan and to seek solutions for that conflict.

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Kiev on Dec. 22 for talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko and other officials seeking to reinvigorate bilateral political and economic cooperation and find lasting peaceful solutions to the bloody conflict in eastern Ukraine.

This was the first visit for the Kazakh leader to Kiev since the change of leadership as the result of Euromaidan revolution and subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections in the fellow post-Soviet country.

Following the talks, the two presidents agreed to intensify the implementation of joint projects in the fields of engineering and agriculture, cooperation on the implementation of innovative technologies in the priority sectors. The two leaders also instructed the two governments to evaluate promising projects in renewable energy and “green” economy.

Continued on Page A8

Nazarbayev Offers to Mediate in Ukraine, Stresses Kazakhstan’s Economic Resilience

By Zhanar Abdulova

ASTANA – President Nursultan Nazarbayev held his annual end-of-year news briefing covering a broad range of areas from the situation in Ukraine to Kazakhstan’s economic stimulus package, terrorism threats, prospects of integration in Eurasia and Almaty’s bid to host the Winter Olympics in 2022.

During an hour-and-a-half question-and-answer session shown on national television channels on Dec. 21, Nazarbayev said the reasons for the continuing confrontation in Ukraine which had crippled the fellow post-Soviet country for the past year laid in the failure by that country’s political elites to secure adequate economic progress over the past two decades. “As a result of weak social policies, poverty of many groups of the Ukrainian society led them to being manipulated by third parties of all kinds,” he said.

Nazarbayev emphasised Ukraine’s historical closeness to Kazakhstan, as well as the presence of a large Ukrainian minority in Kazakhstan.

“The fratricidal war has brought true devastation to eastern Ukraine, and it is a common task to stop the war there, strengthen Ukraine’s independence and secure territorial integrity of Ukraine,” the Kazakh leader said. “Both Ukraine and Russia are equally close to Kazakhstan that is why I am ready to continue talking to leaders in both Kiev and Moscow, as well as in European capitals, in a bid to promote progress in negotiations over lasting peace in eastern Ukraine.”

“We have no conflict of interests. I am like an objective manager who does not support any side, takes a neutral position and can contribute in a constructive way,” he continued. “There is a need to agree on those issues where aspirations of Ukraine, Russia and Europe coincide: ending the way, freeing prisoners, assisting in restoration in eastern Ukraine, determining the status of languages. These are the issues that need to be brought up to the level of the presidents and need to be agreed upon, together with the Europeans.”

[In the early morning of Dec. 22 Nazarbayev left Astana for a visit to Kiev to hold talks with President Petro Poroshenko, which will be followed by a trip to Moscow on Dec. 23 for meetings with President Vladimir Putin of Russia and other leaders in the Eurasian Economic Union and Collective Security Treaty Organisation formats.]

Economy Resilient, While Government Has Resources to Withstand Pressure

Speaking of the impact of reciprocal sanctions between the West and Russia, Nazarbayev said they had no direct impact on Kazakhstan but there was nothing good for his country in this situation either. In his words, the sanctions stand-off is among the reasons of the current crisis in global economy that also brought the falling oil prices.

Continued on Page A2

FM Idrissov’s Visit to Washington Solidifies Kazakhstan-U.S. Partnership

By Altair Nurbekov and Danna Bupezhanova

WASHINGTON, DC – Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov visited the United States on Dec. 10-11 to meet with top American officials to advance bilateral relations and discuss challenges on the global agenda. His meetings at the White House, departments of state, energy and commerce, as well as interaction with American private businesses showed the growing recognition in both capitals of the importance of the wide-ranging bilateral strategic partnership and a great degree of mutual understanding on key international issues.

On Dec. 10, Idrissov and Secretary of State John Kerry co-chaired the third annual meeting of the bilateral Strategic Partnership Dialogue, which covered a broad range of issues of Kazakhstan-U.S. cooperation.

“I am very proud that today we will have the third meeting of our Strategic Partnership Dialogue with Secretary Kerry and I coming here to confirm our strong desire to further cement the strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the United States and take it to the future,” stated Idrissov prior to his meeting with Kerry.

“We’re very grateful for Kazakhstan’s engagement with us on a number of issues – nonproliferation, issues of Afghanistan, trade, development,” Kerry said. “And I think it’s fair to say that in the region the relationship between the United States and Kazakhstan is really one of the most consequential for us, and we’re very grateful for the leadership



Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov (l) met with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Dec. 10 during his official visit to Washington that saw bilateral ties strengthened.

that Kazakhstan has been showing,” he added.

The Strategic Partnership Dialogue is currently the only mechanism of such type in the relations between the Central Asian states and Washington that provides a platform for Kazakhstan and the U.S. to maintain a dialogue on bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation.

Before the meeting, the parties took an opportunity to stress the productive cooperation existing between Kazakhstan and the U.S., as the nations joined efforts to work on the challenge of the so called “Islamic State”, counterterrorism, nonproliferation and issues of Afghanistan. In respect to the ambiguous prospects of the devel-

oping situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. troops, Kerry particularly underlined the significance of Kazakhstan’s initiative to implement an education programme for 1,000 Afghan students, which became “a critical component of capacity building for Afghanistan and of stability.”

During the talks, Kerry commended the gradually developing strategic partnership between the countries and balanced foreign policy of Kazakhstan. He confirmed U.S. support for Kazakh initiatives, including participation in the international exhibition EXPO 2017, as well as promoting Kazakhstan’s accession to the WTO.

Idrissov underlined that in the context of regional security, Asta-

na was committed to Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy and called for all international actors to move past the “big game” approach and adopt the “big gain” approach to benefit all involved.

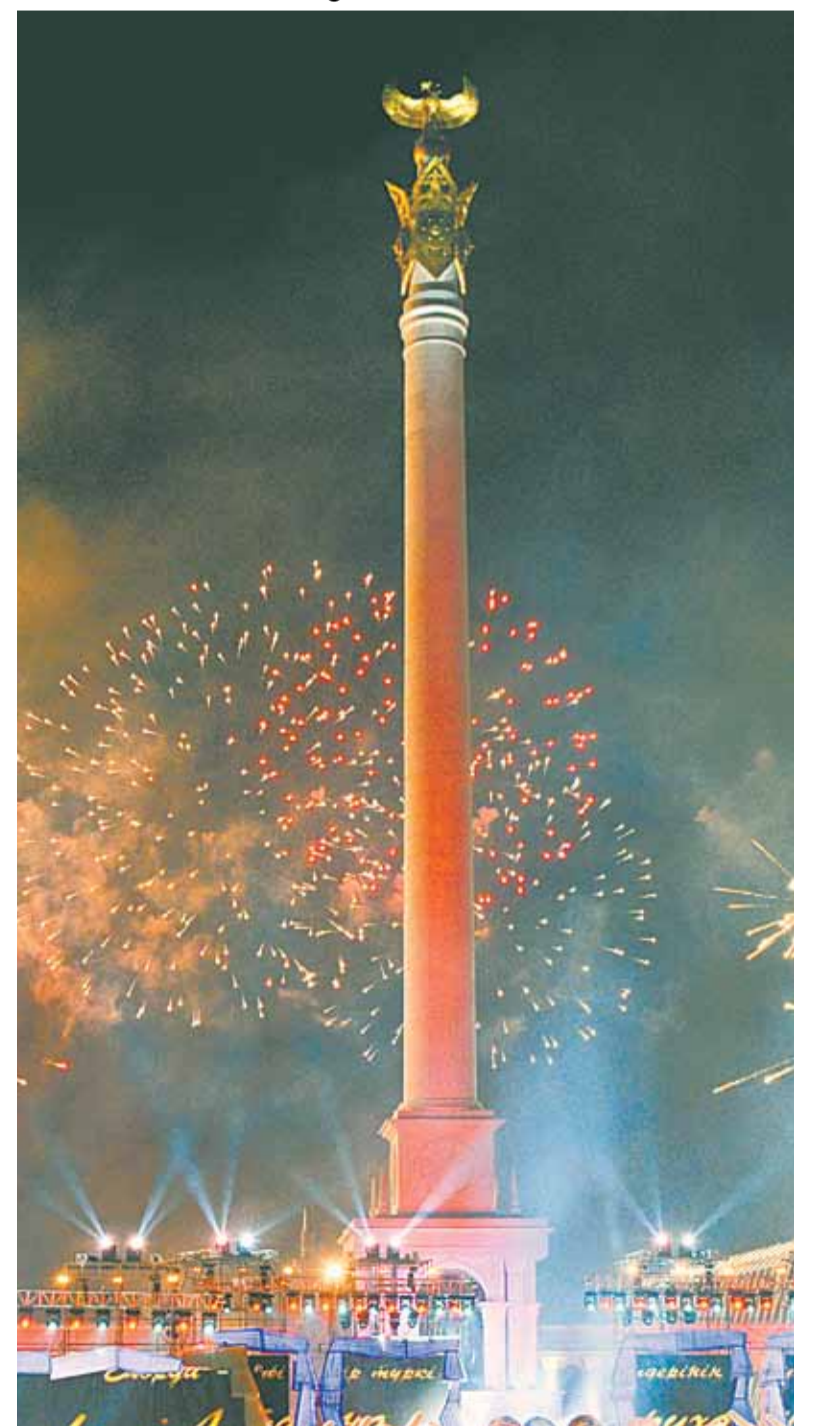
Idrissov and Kerry also discussed pressing international issues, including the fight against terrorism, countering the so-called Islamic State and the critical situation in Ukraine.

Idrissov confirmed Kazakhstan’s steadfast commitment against terrorism and extremism, as well as the unacceptability of using religion as a cover for terrorist actions. Referring to Ukraine, he expressed deep concern about the ongoing conflict in that country, which resulted in a large number of casualties and affected international relations, with Western states and Russia implementing reciprocal sanctions. He highlighted the importance of an early end to the armed confrontation in Ukraine and of resolving conflicts by peaceful means through negotiations, including on the basis of the Minsk agreements agreed to in September.

A joint statement was adopted at the end of the meeting. The document outlined Kazakh and U.S. positions on a number of issues, including partnerships on global issues, non-proliferation, democracy, human rights and development, trade, investment and energy, Afghanistan and regional integration, cooperation on security and law enforcement, military cooperation, education, partnerships in science and technology, humanitarian aid and development assistance and EXPO 2017.

Continued on Page A3

Country Turns 23



Kazakhstan celebrated the 23rd anniversary of its Independence on Dec. 16 with festivities throughout the country and an elaborate firework display near the Kazakh Eli monument in Astana.

NATION
Government Ponders Measures to Improve Kazakhstan’s Standing in Global Competitive Index A2
EBRD supports improving energy efficiency cement plant in Shymkent A2

ECONOMY & BUSINESS
IMF Welcomes Kazakhstan’s Efforts to Advance Country’s Economy A4
Major Almaty-Area Road Project Presented to Investors in London A5

EDITORIAL
The World and Astana Times Bid Adieu to 2014 and Look Forward to 2015 A6

INSIDE

OPINIONS
AHTISAARI: Professionalism, Motivation Behind Finland’s Success as Peacemaker A6
FOEDINGER: Increasing Efficiency in Kazakhstan’s Public Sector with a Shared Service Model A7

NATION & CAPITAL
ATOM Project Inspires Participants at Int’l Anti-Nuclear Weapons Conference B1
Kazakh Language Now Part of Google Translate Services B5

NATION

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Government Ponders Measures to Improve Kazakhstan's Standing in Global Competitive Index

By Alina Usmanova

ASTANA – At a regular government meeting on Dec. 4 led by Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov, improving Kazakhstan's standing in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) was discussed. The discussion focused specifically on improvements needed to be done by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

"The ministry has identified a set of targeted measures aimed at improving the country's positions in the GCI rankings. They include the complete registration of criminal allegations and the optimisation, automation and digitalisation of certain services and licenses," Minister of Internal Affairs Kalmukhanbet Kassymov said.

Deputy Minister of Justice Zauresh Baimoldina reported on efforts to improve indicators assigned to the Ministry of Justice, including the effectiveness of legislation on administrative regulations, property rights, the effectiveness of legislation regarding conflict resolution and intellectual property protection.

According to her, over the past five years, Kazakhstan has improved in these fields. At the same time, the justice ministry proposed new measures to pro-

mote Kazakhstan in the GCI rankings.

Separately, Minister of National Economy Yerbolat Dosayev discussed the comprehensive plan for the socio-economic development of the Zhezkazgan, Satpayev and Ulytau districts of the Karaganda region for 2012-2017, which is currently being implemented.

"In 2012 and 2013, four projects totaling 23.4 billion tenge (US\$127.5 million) were completed and 306 new jobs were created. In the region, two new companies opened and two social service facilities were repaired. This year, 57 projects totaling 14.4 billion tenge (78.5 million) were launched, five of which are related to the provision of medical technological equipment to infrastructure and social services. By the end of the year, 10 measures are expected to have been completed," Dosayev said.

Nurmukhambet Abdibekov, the Akim (Governor) of the Karaganda region, noted that this year's goals had been achieved. Industrial production totaled 140 billion tenge (US\$762.9 million), agricultural output increased by 6 percent; the number of active SMEs increased and 19,000 square metres of housing were commissioned.

EBRD supports improving energy efficiency at cement plant in Shymkent

By Bauyrzhan Almatbayev

ASTANA – The London-based European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is supporting improving energy efficiency in Kazakhstan by facilitating foreign direct investment in the refurbishment of one of the country's largest cement plants, based in the southern city of Shymkent.

According to the bank's Dec. 3 press release, a loan of up to 5 billion tenge (€20 million equivalent) will be provided to Shymkentcement, the Kazakh affiliate of Italcementi Group, one of the largest cement producers in the world. In addition, the EBRD is subscribing to up to 1 billion tenge (€4 million equivalent) of shares in Shymkentcement acquiring an equity stake of around 21 percent.

Shymkent is a major industrial city and a sprawling transportation hub in the south of Kazakhstan. It already has an estimated 900,000 population and is listed as one of the four regional agglomerations in the country that will be developed under a national plan, the other three being Astana, Almaty and Aktobe.

For decades, Shymkent also had major issues with environmental pollution from about a dozen large heavy-industry plants, including lead, oil processing, tire, phosphorus and cement plants. The cement plant itself has existed since 1958, and the cement it produced was used in building up the Baimkonur Cosmodrome, the airports in Almaty and Tashkent, several hydropower stations as well as the

Karakum channel and other notable facilities in Kazakhstan and neighbouring countries.

The concentration of industrial plants in Shymkent as well as the confluence of several railway lines and automobile roads sustained the continuous growth of the city and its ranking as one of the most industrialised, and polluted, cities in the former Soviet Union.

The situation with pollution began to change after the collapse of the USSR, the closure of old heavily polluting enterprises and the introduction of modern technologies by the new owners of the industrial plants.

The newly announced EBRD financing will facilitate the replacement of four existing "wet process" kilns with a new, energy-efficient "dry process" facility. An important example of private-sector FDI in the fast-growing Shymkent region, the project highlights the region's attractiveness even at a time when the global investment climate remains uncertain, the lender said in the press release.

"The new plant will provide modern, efficient local production capacity to support the development of infrastructure, as well as helping to reduce carbon intensity in the Kazakh cement industry. Moreover, it will set a replicable example of introducing alternative fuels, the first time on such a scale in Kazakhstan," the release noted.

The investment will also contribute to the ongoing EBRD policy dialogue with the Kazakh authorities in regard to CO2 emissions regulations and align the Kazakh emissions-trading systems with international standards.

It is expected that Shymkentcement in turn will expand its comprehensive energy and environmental-management systems. The company will also undertake education initiatives, providing traineeships and placements in collaboration with local universities and colleges to spread knowledge about energy-efficient technology and environmental best practice.

"We are pleased to join forces with Italcementi Group to invest in local, energy-efficient production facilities which will support infrastructure development in the fast-growing region of Shymkent. This is an important step towards a more efficient, less carbon-intensive future for the industrial sector of Kazakhstan," said Janet Heckman, EBRD Director for Kazakhstan, said, according to the press release.

"We are proud to partner with the EBRD in this important project in Kazakhstan. This investment is aligned with our goal to become a leader in economic and environmental sustainability across all markets where we operate through the important efficiency gains that the new plant will achieve," Gabriel Morin, Managing Director of Italcementi Group in Kazakhstan, said.

Since the beginning of its operations in Kazakhstan, the EBRD has invested close to US\$ 6.75 billion in the country's economy, with more than half of the total supporting projects in the private sector.

The EBRD, owned by 64 countries and two intergovernmental institutions, is supporting the development of market economies and democracies.

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

"The number of the prison population in Kazakhstan reduced by 4 percent," Kazakh Deputy Prosecutor General Zhakip Assanov said at the Dec. 12 second forum on prison reforms titled, "Employment in Prisons 2017." "The courts began to use alternative types of punishment more often. In 2014, their share was 65 percent and the deprivation of freedom measure was 35 percent. This is the historically low indicator for the country's history, including the Soviet period. We are going to use prison as the last choice as the international standards dictate. This year by 26 percent, courts more often released people on parole or used alternative measures to replace the deprivation of freedom. The number of settlements before trial increased four times," Assanov said. Besides, he noted that the number of settlements was 10,000 in 2012 and in 2014 this number reached 40,000. In addition, the number of arrests during investigations reduced by 11 percent because prosecutors more often began to choose bail instead of arrest. "According to the forecast, the index of the country [in the relevant international ratings] has to climb up 10 positions in two years, from 30th place to 40th. In 2014, the prison population reduced by 1,953 people or 3 percent," Assanov noted.

On the threshold of Independence Day, Minister of Defence Imangali Tasmagambetov congratulated the personnel of the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan on Dec. 15 on the significant date in the history of the development of Kazakh statehood and awarded state decorations to the servicemen on behalf of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Kazakh Deputy Minister of Defence Major General Talgat Mukhtarov and Combatant Commander of the Vostok Regional Command Reserve Major General Murat Bektanov were presented with Danq orders of the second degree. Head of the Combat Training Department of the Headquarters of the Kazakh Armed Forces Colonel Khairulla Ilyasov and head of the Military Engineering Institute of Radio Electronic and Communication Colonel Kairat Sadykov were presented with Aibyn orders of the second degree. In addition, Commander and head of the headquarters of military unit 21751 Colonel Yerlan Nuanov and Colonel Denis Gorbunov were awarded posthumously with Aibyn orders of the second degree. Colonel Kairat Akhmetov was awarded with the Kurmet order for professionalism and excellent serving. Some servicemen were awarded with Yerligi Ushin and Zhauyngerlik Yerligi Ushin medals. More than 20 servicemen were given accelerated promotions.

A Dec. 15 meeting dedicated to Kazakh Independence Day was held in the General Prosecutor's Office in Astana. Addressing the meeting, Prosecutor General Askhat Daulbayev emphasised the importance of independence for Kazakhstan, the success reached by the country over the period of independence, the role of Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev in the establishment of statehood and the enhanced public and political role of prosecution authorities as one of the main legal institutes of the country. By decree of the President, a number of prosecution officers were presented with state awards for excellent performance in the duty, courage and dedication displayed when ensuring law and order and strengthening the national security and defensive capacity of the country. Chairman of the Committee for Legal Statistics and Social Records of the General Prosecutor's Office Saule Aitpayeva and Prosecutor of Karaganda Region Askar Sekishev were awarded Danq orders of the second degree. First Deputy Prosecutor of South Kazakhstan Region Batyrzhan Zhanibekov and Deputy Prosecutor of Aktobe Region Zhaiyilkhan Mukhamedyarov were awarded Aibyn orders of the second degree. Head of the prosecutor's administration of Almaty Azamat Alibekov, Deputy Prosecutor of East Kazakhstan Region Nurlan Bizhanov, First Deputy Prosecutor of Almaty Berik Zhuiriktayev, Prosecutor of the Zhalagash District of the Kyzylorda Region Khatisha Zhumagulova and others were awarded medals for Military Valour. Head of the department of the General Prosecutor's Office Timur Issanov, deputy head of the department of the General Prosecutor's Office Galymzhan Koigeldiyev, head of the Prosecution Administration of West Kazakhstan Region Natalya Kolpakova and others were presented with certificates of merit.

Nazarbayev Offers to Mediate in Ukraine, Stresses Kazakhstan's Economic Resilience

Continued from Page A1

"The government will continue elaborating well thought through solutions that would secure stability of Kazakhstan's economy," he said urging calm among his people who have been worried by the growing economic woes in neighbouring Russia.

Nazarbayev stressed that the trouble with the Russian rouble has confirmed the timeliness of his snap state-of-the-nation address on Nov. 11. He also emphasised the importance of proposed major investments in infrastructure development within the Nurly Zhol new economic policy that is "going to serve a generation of your children."

"Now is the time to invest the funds we had saved in the development of transport links connecting the regions of Kazakhstan," he noted adding that he had been thinking about unveiling the Nurly Zhol strategy over a long time.

Nazarbayev assured the population that all welfare payments would be kept at their current level. He explained that the government had elaborated several scenarios for the development of the nation's financial and economic system based on several price estimates for oil, including that envisaging \$40 for a barrel of oil, and that necessary reserves were at government's disposal.

Speaking about the industrialisation programme implemented in Kazakhstan since 2010, Nazarbayev stressed that it was aimed at increasing domestic production of goods and limiting the influence of currency fluctuations on the incomes of the population through cutting dependence on import of commodities.

Among the real successes of industrialisation programme, Nazarbayev named launching the assembly lines for locomotives and



President Nursultan Nazarbayev (c) met with Kazakh TV reporters in Akorda at the end of December to round up the events of what turned to be rather eventful year both domestically and internationally. (See also editorial on Page A6.)

Multi-Vector Foreign Policy to Remain in Place

Answering a question on the future of Kazakhstan's long-standing multi-vector policy in light of the growing confrontations in the world these days, Nazarbayev said it was natural for a state in the modern world to maintain friendly relations with as many partners as possible.

"Our multi-vector policy has led to us having a very friendly environment. We have no insoluble conflicts with any state. All our borders have been delimited and demarcated, and [are now] enshrined in international law. ... Kazakhstan is a member of the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organisation] and EEU [Eurasian Economic Union] but this does not prevent Kazakhstan from cooperating with third parties," he stressed.

Speaking of the timeliness of the Eurasian Economic Union, which is set to enter into effect on

Jan. 1, 2015, Nazarbayev said it was in no way a recreation of the Soviet Union.

"This year we have created the EEU, completed negotiations on enhanced cooperation agreement with the EU and on our accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). People who say that the EEU is an attempt to recreate the Soviet Union are mistaken. It is utter nonsense," Nazarbayev said, stressing the purely economical nature of integration processes within the EEU.

When asked about international terrorists using Islam as a cover, Nazarbayev said groups such as ISIS posed common threat to the entire world community and Kazakhstan should support international efforts in tackling that problem. To do so, the state in Kazakhstan should increase the population's competence in Islam which would help deflect attempts to abuse people's religious sentiments and warn them against threats posed by this evil.

Almaty's Winter Olympics Bid, if Successful, May Be Shared with Astana

The probability of Almaty winning the bid to host 2022 Winter Olympic Games has aroused many questions among Kazakhstan's public, including one on the relevance of such a costly event. During the briefing, Nazarbayev said he had been thinking long and hard about that bid.

"Almaty has lots of necessary sports facilities already in place, like a skating rink, alpine skiing facilities, a world-class ski jumping hill and a hockey stadium," the President said.

"If selected [to host the Games], Kazakhstan would only need to build an Olympic village and upgrade the current road infrastructure," Nazarbayev explained. "But all of that will serve residents of Almaty afterwards as dormitories and scientific laboratories. The only major construction expense would involve construction of a bobsleigh track."

"If the International Olympic Committee allows, Astana would also be ready to host part of the events. We are not going to spend 50 or 40 or 30 billion dollars. There will be expenses but we can manage them," he said.

Pondering on the outcomes of the year, the President noted is was full of serious events and major meetings.

Notably, in 2014 he has met more than 40 foreign leaders, while seven full days were spent in the air.

Concluding his annual meeting with TV reporters, Nazarbayev answered a couple of personal questions. He said he took to drawing this year, comparing his new hobby with meditation and noting it helps to put his thoughts in order.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan "strongly condemns the act of terrorism committed in the Pakistani city of Peshawar on Dec. 16," the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement released on Dec. 17.

According to news reports quoting the Pakistani military, seven militants from the Pakistani Taliban attacked an army-run school in Peshawar, killing 141 people, including 132 children.

"We express our deep condolences to the government of Pakistan, the families and close ones of those who perished and wish speedy recovery to all injured during the terrorist attack," the Kazakh foreign ministry said joining in nearly universal condemnation of the heinous act, the Taliban's deadliest in Pakistan.

"The killing of innocent children and teachers causes special indignation and revulsion and shows the utmost inhuman nature of terrorists," it added.

"Kazakhstan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, urges the international community to take collective efforts in decisive fight against this scourge and calls for the soonest adoption of a Universal Convention on the Fight Against International Terrorism," the Kazakh foreign ministry said.

The Astana EXPO 2017 National Company and Belarus Republican Union of Tourist Organizations signed a memorandum of partnership during the Dec. 11-12 visit of a Kazakh delegation to Belarus led by EXPO 2017 Commissioner and Kazakh First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Rapol Zhoshybayev. Bilateral meetings with Belarus Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Rusyi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei, Chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences Vladimir Gusakov and heads of research and development institutes were held as part of the visit. At the meeting with Rusyi, the EXPO 2017 commissioner emphasised the contribution to the development of bilateral trade and economic relations made by the Kazakh-Belarusian intergovernmental commission co-chaired by Rusyi. Zhoshybayev informed the Belarus deputy prime minister about the process of preparation and theme for EXPO2017. The issues of cooperation of the countries' scientific and IT institutes and their participation in the exhibition were addressed as well. As Rusyi is the Belarus commissioner at EXPO 2015 in Milan, he said Minsk would be properly presented at EXPO 2017 too.

Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov met Turkmenistan Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers Satlyk Satlykov Dec. 17 at the House of Government. During the meeting, the parties discussed expanding bilateral cooperation in transit, transport and logistics.

Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov met Dec. 14 with Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah. Massimov and Abdullah discussed cooperation in the trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres, as well as exchanged views on regional security issues. Following the talks, the sides called for deepening cooperation across the whole spectrum of bilateral relations.

Prosecutor General of Kazakhstan Askhat Daulbayev visited Great Britain Dec. 4 where he met with the heads of the country's law enforcement agencies. At the meeting with Attorney General for England and Wales Jeremy Wright, the sides noted the strategic level of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Great Britain and prospects for cooperation in the legal sphere. A wide range of issues were also discussed with Minister of Justice Christopher Grayling. Daulbayev and Grayling signed a memorandum on mutual understanding between Kazakhstan and Great Britain on legal cooperation and the establishment of a joint consultative committee. The signed document will allow Kazakhstan and Great Britain to cooperate and exchange experience in the legal sphere and will allow Great Britain to support Kazakhstan's process to join European conventions in the sphere of criminal procedure and activating the work on signing bilateral agreements on mutual legal assistance.

SCO Prime Ministers Discuss Increasing Economic Cooperation at Council in Astana

By Danna Bupezhanova

ASTANA – The heads of governments of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) states met in Astana's Palace of Independence on Dec. 15 to examine ways to deepen trade, economic and humanitarian relations within the organisation. This is the third time the SCO heads of governments have met in Kazakhstan.

"The organisation is gaining political clout and economic power. Today, its voice is heard everywhere. Today's meeting is a landmark, and we always say that we must have 'Shanghai Spirit,'" President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev said when meeting the SCO heads of government at Akorda prior to their separate set of meetings.

Prior to the SCO meeting, Nazarbayev met Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, Premier of China's State Council Li Keqiang, Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Joomart Otorbayev, Prime Minister of Tajikistan Kohir Rasulzoda, First Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Uzbekistan Rustam Azimov, SCO Secretary General Dmitry Mezentssev and Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO's Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure Zhan Xinfeng.

"The organisation works primarily for the sake of stability, the lessening of territorial disputes among [member states] and the joint fight against the three evils of our time: separatism, extremism and terrorism. We also need to address issues of food, environmental and energy security. The SCO states have the capacity to meet their needs in energy and food. In the framework of joint work, we can also solve problems of water scarcity and access to other resources," Nazarbayev stated. He noted that the upcoming SCO Council of Heads of State in Ufa, Russia in 2015 is expected to approve the development strategy of



President Nazarbayev (top centre) met with the prime ministers of SCO member states to discuss economic cooperation in Astana on Dec. 15.

the organisation to 2025, emphasising that Kazakhstan supports the initiative of establishing the SCO Development Bank.

Addressing the need to focus on developing transport cooperation within the SCO, Nazarbayev underlined Kazakhstan's important ongoing transport projects, including the Western Europe – Western China highway, which is expected to promote the development of the national economy as well as intensify bilateral trade and business relations throughout the region. At the meeting with the Chinese premier, Nazarbayev highlighted joint Kazakh-Chinese work on the construction of the Khorgos trade centre, railways and roads to ensure transit through the country.

"In this context, we support China's initiative to revive the Silk Road and create the fund and bank for infrastructure projects," he added.

During the council, participants underlined that currently, the SCO is seeking to incorporate more economic issues into its agenda, develop transport infrastructure and transit potential, as well as promote innovation, energy and food security, and agriculture.

Addressing the council in an extended format, Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov emphasised the need to find ways to develop the SCO amid global economic turbulence and rising social tensions.

"We will conduct comprehensive work on the development of the SCO Development Strategy to 2025, which will unlock the potential of the organisation, to make it stronger," he said, expressing confidence that increasing economic cooperation should be the cornerstone of SCO development in the coming decades.

"One of the most important conditions for further economic integration within the SCO framework is the development of modern transport and communication infrastructure. We are ready to become an important part of the transit corridor in the SCO," Massimov stated.

The prime minister also noted that Kazakhstan was ready to sign the memorandum of cooperation on the development and application of risk management and a protocol on cooperation between law-enforcement related customs services.

He also highlighted the need for

an inventory of the current action plan to implement a multilateral trade and economic cooperation programme and of project activities within the SCO from 2017-2021.

Elaborating on expanding economic collaboration, Keqiang stressed China's willingness to create favourable conditions for promoting cooperation in agriculture. "We are willing to allocate \$50 million for the development of technology," he declared.

China is also ready to open factories for the production of glass, cement and agricultural products processing in Kazakhstan, he said. Medvedev emphasised the prospects of enhancing transit cooperation and creating a common transport space within the SCO. "I think that the agreement on the international road, signed in September, will increase the interconnectedness of the SCO member states. The next step is a programme of coordinated development of highways, currently being developed by SCO member states' departments," he added.

Referring to advancing humanitarian cooperation, SCO Secretary General Dmitry Mezentssev advocated establishing an SCO institute of health and social support, which would combine the potential of classical European and traditional Chinese medicine for treatment, rehabilitation and disease prevention.

"It would improve the mechanism for combating the spread of infectious diseases, ensure the sanitary and epidemiological welfare of the population and complement the interaction potential among medical units of the Ministries of Emergency Situations of the member states," he said.

Given Kazakhstan's efforts to engage with international organisations and take a growing role in the region and on the global stage, Kazakhstan has always considered effective cooperation within the SCO a foreign policy prior-

ity and an important component of Central Asia security. According to President Nazarbayev, "the three pillars of the Eurasian idea implemented on the initiative of Kazakhstan involve the Eurasian Economic Community, the CICA [Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia] and the SCO." With the Eurasian Economic Union set to enter into force next month, Massimov stated that, "Eurasian integration may become a new factor that can complement and strengthen the economic component of the SCO."

The Council of the SCO Heads of Governments was attended by the prime ministers of Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan's First Deputy Prime Minister. SCO observer countries were represented at the council session by Chief Executive of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah, Minister of State for External Affairs of India Vijay Kumar Singh, Minister of Agriculture of Iran Mahmoud Hojjati Najaf Abadi, Ambassador of Mongolia to Kazakhstan Zhagir Suhee and Adviser to the Prime Minister of Pakistan's National Security and International Affairs Sartadzh Aziz. International organisations included the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and CICA.

At the end of the meeting, the parties signed a joint communiqué of the Council of Heads of Governments of the SCO.

The SCO was created in 2001 and remains open to new members. The main goals of its charter are strengthening trust, friendship and neighbourliness, and encouraging more effective cooperation in order to enhance the collective security, stability and prosperity of all member states.

FM Idrissov's Visit to Washington Solidifies Kazakhstan-U.S. Partnership

Continued from Page A1

During the visit, Idrissov also held a series of meetings with officials from the U.S. National Security Council, Department of Energy and Department of Commerce.

At a White House meeting with U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice, the two touched upon strengthening regional stability and sustainable development. Rice emphasised the positive role of Kazakhstan in expanding economic activity and strengthening cooperation in the Central Asian region.

At a meeting with U.S. Deputy Secretary of Commerce Bruce Andrews and Deputy Secretary of Energy Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, the parties discussed further intensification of trade and investment and energy cooperation. In particular, Andrews confirmed U.S. interest in cooperation to increase the investment attractiveness of Kazakhstan and expand the presence of American business in the state. He stated that proposed large-scale infrastructure projects in accordance with the new Nuryly Zhol economic policy announced by President Nursultan Nazarbayev were a testament to the strategic vision of Kazakhstan's President and were very positively perceived by American business.

The meeting with Sherwood-Randall focused on bilateral cooperation in the field of nuclear energy and strengthening the non-proliferation regime. Idrissov and Sherwood-Randall stressed the importance of the bilateral energy commission, which covered a wide range of issues from oil and nuclear power to renewable energy sources. The parties emphasised the importance of the timely

completion of the negotiations and signing of an agreement between Kazakhstan and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the establishment of a low-enriched uranium fuel bank.

During his stay in the U.S., Idrissov also served as the keynote speaker at the opening of the second Kazakhstan-American Convention, "Working Together for a Secure Future." The event was attended by the heads of various departments, more than 30 members of Congress, executives of leading U.S. companies, representatives of think tanks and the media.

Addressing the audience, Idrissov elaborated on Kazakh foreign policy priorities to promote peace and security in the region and the world, measures taken to ensure the economic development of the country and its neighbours and the nation's industrial and innovative growth amid economic crisis and global recession.

In his speech, he said, "There is a long way to go before our country can join the ranks of the most developed nations but we are starting from a strong position. We have made great progress since our independence in 1991. Our vibrant market economy has grown twenty-fold. For the past decade, we have been the fastest growing nation in the region and are now the economic powerhouse in Central Asia."

He stated that to address external economic challenges Kazakhstan planned to use the National Fund, consisting of the revenues from extractive industries collected over the past years. "We will now use funds from it to further transform our economy – develop transport, energy, industrial and social infra-

structure, and empower our small and medium businesses," he added.

At the same time, he emphasised that the state was determined to accept its responsibility as an international actor, particularly to promote a settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. In this respect, the government of Kazakhstan allocated \$2.38 million for the construction of social infrastructure in Afghanistan and more than \$17 million for emergency food assistance. To promote its integration into regional structures, Kazakhstan initiated the convening of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), which it will seek to transform into the Organisation for Security and Development in Asia.

In his remarks, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Hoagland commended Kazakhstan's leading role in the nonproliferation movement. He stressed that "Kazakhstan has been, and continues to be, a leader in this [nonproliferation and arms control] field, both seen in past efforts such as Project Sapphire and the relinquishing of their nuclear arsenal, as well as in current efforts, including establishing a regional Nuclear Security Training centre and offering to host the IAEA low-enriched uranium fuel bank. ... Kazakhstan's hosting of the P5+1 talks on Iran in 2013 was instrumental in the international community's efforts to reach a diplomatic solution on the Iranian nuclear programme. Through these and other nonproliferation efforts, Kazakhstan has made tremendous contributions to international security."

Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, one of the

keynote speakers, stated that Kazakhstan played an important role in the region and that sustainable development in Central Asia was possible only through closer cooperation within the region, primarily in the economic sphere.

Deputy Administrator for National Nuclear Security Administration Anne Harrington and former Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman elaborated on the historical importance of Kazakhstan-U.S. cooperation in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including within the Joint Commission on Energy Partnership and highlighted the importance of Project Sapphire, a formerly secret 1994 Kazakhstan-U.S. operation to remove and downblend around 600 kilograms of highly enriched uranium.

Andrew Kuchins, a senior fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, emphasised Kazakhstan's key role in the development of transport corridors and transcontinental trade relations in Eurasia, calling the nation "an important partner" for the development of the New Silk Road.

The Kazakhstan foreign minister also participated in the roundtable organised by the U.S.-Kazakhstan Business Association on Dec. 11. The event was attended by such companies as AES Corporation, AGCO, Bechtel, Boeing, Cashman Equipment Corp., Chevron Corporation, Deere & Company, Eli Lilly, Fluor Corporation, Inc. and others.

Idrissov informed the gathering about the large-scale measures undertaken by the government of Kazakhstan to improve the investment climate, presented in detail legislative and other innovations, including

tax incentives for foreign investors, the establishment of the Investment Ombudsman, the introduction of a visa-free regime for citizens of 10 countries that are the leading economic partners of Kazakhstan.

U.S. businessmen expressed interest in expanding cooperation with Kazakhstan in light of the implementation of the Nuryly Zhol policy, forthcoming accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), preparations for the international specialised exhibition EXPO 2017 and entry into force of the treaty on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) on Jan. 1, 2015.

Idrissov highlighted Kazakhstan's efforts to establish "all the necessary conditions to encourage joint partnerships." He said that Kazakhstan had "a liberal market economy, favourable tax and customs regimes, one of the best investment incentives in the region and improving legislation aimed at providing protection of investors' rights. As a result, the volume of American foreign direct investment (FDI) in Kazakhstan in the first half of 2014 was \$2.3 billion, almost twice the level of the same period in 2013. Most American FDI goes to the mining industry, real estate and business services, financial sector and processing industry."

Briefing the roundtable participants on plans to develop a green economy, the foreign minister drew attention to the preferences granted to companies working in the field of alternative energy and using energy-efficient technologies, presenting Kazakhstan as a platform for implementation of investment projects with further access to the markets of the EEU and Central Asia.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

IMF Welcomes Kazakhstan's Efforts to Advance Country's Economy

By Danna Buzepzhanova

ASTANA – An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission in Kazakhstan recently commended the state's actions to advance the economy's potential through additional fiscal stimulus from the National Fund and multilateral development banks, modernising physical infrastructure, promoting private sector development and reviving the financial sector.

The IMF mission, led by Hossein Samiei, a division chief at the organisation's Middle East and Central Asia department, released the concluding statement on Kazakhstan's economy for 2014 at the end of the Dec. 3-8 visit to Astana and Almaty to review economic and financial sector developments and policies.

The statement, published Dec. 9, determined external and internal challenges faced by the economy this year which affected the final data. Among external challenges,

weaker domestic and external demand (especially from Russia, China and Europe), continued regional uncertainty and falling oil prices were underlined. As a result, economic growth slowed down from 6.0 percent in 2013 to a projected 4.3 percent in 2014. At the same time, heightened external risks increased the urgency of ongoing efforts to bolster financial sector resilience, as the large stock of non-performing loans (NPLs) remained a serious burden on banks' ability to properly intermediate credit.

The statement commended recent legislative amendments in the tax regime aimed at easing NPL resolution and recapitalisation of the Problem Loan Fund. It also called for authorities to follow through expeditiously with their plans to attain the end-2015 NPL target of 10 percent, which will hinge on a successful reduction of the Kazkommertsbank-BTA's nonperforming loans. It also insisted on full implementation of

the IMF's Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) recommendations, including closely monitoring systemic risks with greater emphasis on risk-based supervision and conducting a banking asset quality review.

In light of declining oil prices and increased spending from Kazakhstan's National Fund, the statement emphasised that while strengthening the fiscal policy framework remained a priority, it was essential to focus on extending the budget coverage to all fiscal activity, including those related to the National Fund, and improve the budget integration within the broader macroeconomic framework.

The statement also commended the augmented fiscal stimulus financed from the National Fund and multilateral development banks (MDBs). According to IMF's estimations, it could total up to 7 percent of the GDP over the next three to five years and is expected to increase the economy's poten-

tial through modernising physical infrastructures, promoting private sector development and reviving the financial sector.

At the same time, the report highlighted the need for a strong and sustained government commitment to ensuring fiscal sustainability and macro stability. That included the authorities' assurance of avoiding a pro-cyclical bias over the medium term, such as by conditioning spending in 2017 on economic performance in the prior two years and guaranteeing high-quality spending through improved project appraisal and procurement policy with help from multilateral development banks (MDBs).

Referring to the National Bank's plans to overhaul its monetary policy framework and operations, the statement underlined that the medium-term objective should be to adopt an inflation-targeting framework. It stated that the policy rate should allow for greater exchange rate fluctuations within the existing band, as well as widening of

the band over time. To anchor expectations about policy intentions and operations, it was also critical to actively communicate the transition plans, including by expeditiously publishing the monetary policy guidelines for 2015-16. The IMF staff also confirmed its willingness to provide further technical assistance in all these areas.

To assist Kazakhstan in expanding its role in the international arena and furthering economic cooperation, especially while joining the Eurasian Economic Union to be launched in January 2015, extending cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union and finalising World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession, the IMF mission stressed the necessity to conduct structural reforms aimed at improving the business climate, promoting job creation, bolstering human capital and institutions and reducing state intervention in the economy.

ECONOMY NEWS IN BRIEF

Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov held a meeting with Prime Minister of Tajikistan Kohir Rasulzoda on Dec. 15. They discussed bilateral trade and economic cooperation, including cooperation in investment, cultural and humanitarian spheres. The parties noted opportunities to increase mutual trade and expressed the need to expand business partnerships.

At a Dec. 14 meeting held in the Prime Minister's Office between Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov and Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Joomart Otorbayev, the heads of government discussed trade cooperation and economic and investment issues, as well as progress in implementing these agreements. The sides noted the strength of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz partnership, highlighting the potential for expanded cooperation.

Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Massimov took part in an expanded Dec. 11 meeting of the Presidium of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs (NCE) of Kazakhstan. During the meeting, the board heard a report on work done by the NCE, as well as reports by the chairmen of the Committees of the Presidium of the NCE and regional chambers of entrepreneurs. In his speech, Massimov noted that a constructive dialogue between the government and entrepreneurs was established this year thanks to NCE efforts. "Representatives of the NCE always take part in our government meetings as well as others. They express their views on particular issues and open up to us. The important thing is to maintain and strengthen the link between the state and businesses," Massimov concluded.

In Moscow, First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Bakytzhan Sagintayev took part in a Dec. 10 meeting of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), where the most pressing issues regarding the Customs Union (CU) and the Common Economic Space (CES) and the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) were discussed. The council meeting saw the preparation of the draft treaty on the accession of the Kyrgyz Republic to the EEU treaty. "By and large, the draft treaty is ready," Sagintayev said. Furthermore, certain decisions regarding EEU operations were made. In particular, the budget of the EEU for 2015 and EEC regulations were approved. An agreement was also reached on certain issues regarding the exchange of information pertaining to industrial and agricultural cooperation among EEU member states. These arrangements will effectively plan the industrial and agricultural policies in member states. "We had a fruitful meeting today and have found mutually beneficial solutions to important issues surrounding Eurasian economic integration," Sagintayev declared. During his visit, Sagintayev also held several meetings with his Russian counterparts. At a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich, the parties discussed the negotiation process on Kazakhstan's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as cooperation undertaken in the spirit of Eurasian integration. During the meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, the functioning of the Baikonur complex, including the implementation of the Baiterek project was discussed. Following the talks, the first deputy prime minister of Kazakhstan and Russia's deputy prime minister expressed interest in expanding bilateral cooperation in space exploration.

According to the Kazakhstan Development Bank, the institution has allocated 50 billion tenge (US\$272.36 million) for long-term lending to projects in the processing industry via commercial banks. In line with the financing scheme, Baiterek provides loans totaling 50 billion tenge (272.36 million) to the bank for long-term lending to projects in processing industries through commercial banks. Thus, the credit will be subject to 23 manufacturing sectors, including food processing, oil refining, clothing and paper products. Thirteen banks participated in the programme. The Kazakhstan Development Bank has signed loan agreements with these banks. In this regard, the government approved loan terms for final borrowers. Thus, the nominal interest rate for lending will be no more than 6 percent per year, loan terms will be no longer than 10 years, loans will be paid in tenge, the grace period for payment will be 24 months.

ESCAP, Kazakhstan to Promote Renewable Energy in Pacific Islands

By Askar Akhmetov

BANGKOK – Kazakhstan and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) signed a new trust fund agreement Dec. 3 that provides a \$200,000 voluntary contribution to ESCAP and aims to bolster renewable energy for the Pacific Islands.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Kazakh Ambassador to Thailand Marat Yessenbayev stressed that food, water and energy security are key priorities for Kazakhstan's election campaign as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017-18.

"With its large conventional energy resources, Kazakhstan is committed to the development of a green economy through diversification and development of alternative energy sources. The energy crisis and limited access to food and water are a serious threat to sustainable development and stability and deserve the world's attention," he noted.

Addressing the gathering, UN Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary Dr. Shamshad Akhtar acknowledged the strengthened partnership and welcomed the agreement in support of renewable energy.

The project, launched in partnership with ESCAP, focuses on the installation and rollout of sanitation and energy systems in ten small island developing states: Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Tonga. This is based on successful experiences and lessons from existing biogas approaches in the Pacific.

The Capacity Development Trust Fund Agreement between ESCAP and the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs will support development of biogas-based renewable energy solutions in the Pacific Islands. The signing followed initial discussions between ESCAP and the Kazakh government in Astana and at the Third International Conference for Small Island Developing States, held in Samoa in September.

As stated at that conference by Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, the geographic isolation of the Pacific Islands creates fundamental challenges that hinder their growth and prosperity. In a sense, Kazakhstan shares many challenges with the Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

"Just as we are land-locked, they are, in a way, sea-locked, with their encirclement by the great ocean and their remoteness

from major growth hubs aggravating, not helping their lot. One of the greatest challenges they all share is a lack of energy resources and the resulting high cost of energy. And here is an area where Kazakhstan can play a concrete and constructive role and is already pursuing a number of efforts – big and small – to help meet this challenge," Idrissov wrote in his blog after the conference.

During his trip, Idrissov shared his vision of further Kazakhstan-SIDS cooperation with the "Samoa Observer."

"Climate change recognises no boundaries. The chaos it causes affects us all. We are already seeing in Kazakhstan the rising temperatures and more frequent severe weather that climate change is predicted to cause. We recognise, however, that for Small Island Developing States like Samoa the threat is far more severe. In some cases, it threatens the very existence of nations," he wrote in an opinion published by that newspaper.

"We firmly believe that we have to find ways to specifically help the SIDS overcome basic and fundamental difficulties, such as those of limited freshwater, biodiversity and land resources, resulting in rapid depletion and degradation which affects waste management. The SIDS need help in reducing their heavy dependence on precious and restricted food, water and energy resources and in building their resilience to climate change, natural disasters and external shocks due to global developments," he noted.

"We have to be ambitious in creating partnerships to share technology and best practices with countries throughout the world, no matter what their stage of development. We will only begin to tackle climate change successfully when it can be done without putting the brakes on economic growth and the prosperity it brings for our citizens," Idrissov noted.

Thus, Kazakhstan will be hosting the international specialised exhibition EXPO 2017, which will focus on the theme of Future Energy. In three years, the country is planning to attract at least 100 countries and 10 international organisations to the event to help drive forward innovation and development in the energy sector. Kazakhstan sees EXPO 2017 as a key to bring together governments, international organisations and private business to find solutions to sustainable growth.

The Green Bridge Partnership Programme is another Kazakh

initiative that brings together several countries, from Germany to Mongolia, to promote technology transfer and innovation in energy. The ultimate goal of the programme is to find common solutions to meet the energy needs of the international community. It provides measures to create conditions and infrastructure to improve access to green technology and investment and transfer of practical and successful man-

agement experience to interested countries and organisations.

The programme, initiated in 2010 by the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development of the Asia-Pacific region in Astana, was presented the following year at Environment for Europe, the Seventh Pan-European Ministerial Conference. The Green Bridge programme for Europe, Asia and the Pacific represents 95 countries,

70 percent of the world's population and more than 90 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions.

Kazakhstan is a key partner and emerging donor of ESCAP, providing its support to technical cooperation work in areas of environment, energy and financing for sustainable development and hosting ESCAP's Subregional Office for North and Central Asia in Almaty.

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BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

A total of 13,543 property legalisation applications amounting to 103.3 billion tenge (US\$562.86 million) had been received by Dec. 11 by the local executive commissions charged with accepting them. The applications include 10,484 for real property items worth 75.4 billion tenge (US\$410.9 million), 7,034 for non-residential properties worth 26.3 billion tenge (US\$143.3 million), including 1,259 commercial facilities worth 14.6 billion tenge (US\$79.5 million). Also, 20 applications were received for legalisation of shares in legal entities worth a total of 0.7 billion tenge (US\$3.81 million.) Another 5,056 properties worth 27.4 billion tenge (US\$149.29 million) were legalised. No applications for legalisation of property registered overseas have been received. In terms of applications already submitted, the Almaty region and Almaty city are in the lead, followed by the Aktobe region. The West Kazakhstan region has submitted the fewest applications. The number of applications submitted for property legalisation is as follows: Akmola region – 250; Aktobe region – 1,172; Almaty region – 4,311; Atyrau region – 237; East Kazakhstan region – 353; Zhambyl region – 734; West Kazakhstan region – 91; Karaganda region – 383; Kyzylorda region – 176; Kostanay region – 1,142; Mangystau region – 187; Pavlodar region – 208; North Kazakhstan region – 278; South Kazakhstan region – 311; Almaty – 2,823; Astana – 887.

“This memorandum of cooperation just signed with the KAZENERGY Association is aimed at promoting EXPO 2017,” First Deputy Chairman of Astana EXPO 2017 Alisher Pirmetov said while addressing journalists after the memo’s Dec. 10 signing ceremony. “Our cooperation will firstly be focused on promoting the exhibition, attracting participants and the latest technologies in Kazakhstan’s energy conservation infrastructure, as well as the latest renewable energy technologies,” Pirmetov said. According to him, it is planned to utilise the association’s experience in establishing relations with international organisations, such as the World Energy Council and Energy Charter. It is stipulated in the memorandum that the KAZENERGY Association would actively inform its partners and EXPO 2017 member states about the exhibition in Astana.

At a Dec. 12 meeting between President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev and Chairman and CEO of Arcelor Mittal Lakshmi Mittal, the parties discussed the company’s main activities in Kazakhstan. The President noted the success of Arcelor Mittal. “In general, higher prices on the company’s products have improved its performance. This has spurred profit growth. Our same basic strategic goal of increasing steel production to six million tonnes per year remains,” Nazarbayev said. Kazakhstan’s President also drew attention to the importance of favourable social conditions for workers in the company. “Currently, the main thing is the social well-being of those in the workplace. I have a special relationship with Temirtau metallurgists and Karaganda miners. Therefore, when jobs are cut or wages are not paid, I am directly contacted,” he said. The chairman and chief executive officer said that the company continues to develop its production capabilities and increase its investments. “In the last four years, despite the turmoil plaguing the global economy, ArcelorMittal has been constantly expanding and we have invested on average growth between \$350 and \$400 million per year. We continue to improve and expand production in our blast furnaces and central plant,” Mittal said. The important role of the country’s economy and the need for its strength in the second five-year programme of industrial-innovative development was noted.

On Dec. 12, a meeting of the National Commission for Women’s Affairs and Demographic Policy of Kazakhstan was held. Secretary of State Gulshara Abydkalikova delivered a speech. According to her, gender equality in the work place is a must. “According to the tasks set in the President’s state-of-the-nation address, we need to maximise female involvement in all infrastructure projects and increase the level of employment among women,” she said. It is important to note that the unemployment level among women in Kazakhstan is currently 5.5 percent; the total unemployment level in Kazakhstan is 5.2 percent.

Major Almaty-Area Road Project Presented to Investors in London

By Danna Bupzhanova

The Big Almaty Ring Road (BAKAD) project concept was presented Dec. 9 to British investors at the headquarters of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London.

BAKAD seeks to clear Almaty’s city roads from transportation traffic, particularly addressing transit commercial vehicles, and establish near-road infrastructure. According to government information, the project envisages the construction of a highway with four and six technical category traffic lanes with asphalt concrete pavement, eight interchanges and other structures, as well as an intelligent transport payment system. The project will stretch 66 kilometres through portions of the Karasai, Ile and Talgar districts in the Almaty region with a capacity of 38,000 vehicles per day, according to information provided by the government.

The BAKAD project is one of the biggest non-oil infrastructure public-private partnership (PPP) projects financed by the private sector. At the meeting with representatives of the international investment community, Minister for National Economy and head of the Kazakh delegation Yerbolat Dossayev said, “The total amount of investment into construction works alone is estimated at around \$700 million.”

Dossayev briefed the gathering on the major provisions of the “Nurly Zhol – Path to the Future” state-of-the-nation address delivered by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, main indicators of

economic development in Kazakhstan, new investment legislation, prospects for doing business in Kazakhstan in light of the Eurasian Economic Union and approaching accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as Kazakhstan’s many state-supported measures for foreign direct investment.

The presidential address emphasised the importance of transportation infrastructure, particularly highways along international transportation routes to Kazakhstan’s development given the country’s geographical location in the centre of the Eurasian continent. In this respect, the Western Europe – Western China transitional corridor, which includes BAKAD, is a major project as many of Kazakhstan’s major trade partners are interested in the corridor’s development. BAKAD also “benefits from one of the competitive advantages of Kazakhstan – its location on the intersection of major corridors connecting Asia and Europe,” Dossayev said.

At the presentation to investors, the BAKAD project team provided information on conditions for tendering, including the technical, economic and legal aspects of the project.

First Deputy Minister for Investment and Development Zhenis Kassymbek underlined existing interest on the part of international financial institutions and major investment banks in implementing the project. He stressed that the success and quality of the project has great significance for Kazakhstan as “future implementation of PPP projects in Kazakhstan depends on it.”

Concerning state support for foreign direct investment, Dossayev stated in November that to increase the attractiveness of capital-intensive projects, including BAKAD, Kazakhstan’s legislation introduced a possibility of concluding a direct agreement between the creditor, the state and the concessionaire on projects of special importance and a possibility of recourse to international arbitration.

“Kazakhstan at the moment has great opportunities for the development of PPP, and I personally, and the government hope that the project will be successfully implemented in collaboration with our private partners,” he said.

In July 2012, the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Kazakhstan, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the EBRD signed a memorandum “On technical cooperation for the implementation of the concession project in the road sector of the Republic of Kazakhstan.” Within the framework of this memorandum, construction of BAKAD was selected as a pilot project. According to the signed memorandum, EBRD and IFC will provide technical and legal assistance for the selection of concessionaires capable of managing large-scale road projects and conduct tendering procedures.

At the moment, there are 30 PPP projects in Kazakhstan at various stages of readiness in sectors such as transport, health, education, prison system, urban infrastructure, culture and sport – all totaling \$2.7 billion. The majority of those projects, 25 out of 30, totaling \$1.6 billion, are being implemented in rural areas.

EBRD to Lend \$30 Million in Tenge to Private Rail Company

By Michelle Witte

The European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) will lend the equivalent of \$30 million in the local currency, the tenge, to Kazakhstan’s Eastcomtrans rail company to purchase rolling stock and other cargo transit equipment, the EBRD said in a press release on Dec. 10. Some of the loan will also be used for balance sheet restructuring.

One of the EBRD’s stated priorities in Kazakhstan is supporting the private sector, and Eastcomtrans is a private company operating in a railway sector dom-

inated by state-owned companies. The second stage of the financing package, the details of which are still being worked out, will allow for a loan of an additional \$25 million, the EBRD press release said.

“This financing was organised in a difficult economic setting with limited access to international funding available to the company. The loan demonstrates our commitment to Kazakhstan, where this year we are on track to have record investment totaling \$750 million,” said Thomas Maier, EBRD managing director for infrastructure, at the signing of the agreement in Almaty.

The EBRD has provided several

loans to organisations operating in Kazakhstan’s railway sector this year. In March, it announced a \$9 million loan to joint stock company Olzha. In September, the EBRD announced that they would provide a loan of more than \$165 million in local currency to state rail company Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, the largest local currency loan by the EBRD in Kazakhstan as of that date.

During this year’s Astana Economic Forum, the EBRD and the National Bank of Kazakhstan signed two agreements to enable the EBRD to source up to \$1 billion in tenge from the National Bank to lend onward to Kazakh organisations.

Kazakhstan, China Ink \$14 billion in Cooperation Deals

By Maliika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan Prime Minister Karim Massimov and his Chinese counterpart, Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang approved and signed \$14 billion worth of accords on Dec. 14-15 in Astana, including several cooperation agreements on nuclear energy, development of mineral resources and the use of national currencies in commercial operations.

The two heads of government discussed their macro-economic policies and agreed to additional meetings to address international fluctuations in the price of hydrocarbons, in particular crude oil.

“The interest of Chinese business in Kazakhstan is very high. In turn, I can confirm that this is a mutual interest. It is a pleasure to say that trade and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and China is expanding. In today’s unstable economic situation across the world, our countries should use the potential of our friendship to solve important problems for the benefit of our countries,” Li said.

Massimov stressed that Kazakhstan welcomes foreign investment in the industrial and manufacturing sectors and the creation of high-tech industries with high added value. All necessary conditions were created for investors, he said.

The National Bank of Kazakhstan and the People’s Bank of China also signed an agreement on mutual settlements in national currencies, as well as an agreement on currency swaps of Kazakh tenge and Chinese yuan. This agreement will promote local currency settlement and enhance both countries’ immunity to financial risks and global competitiveness.

The national railroad companies also signed a cooperation agreement to promote the transport of merchandise, the aim of which is to create a new Silk Road, a trade corridor from the Asian giant to Europe.

The two nations also agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the electric energy sector, a move that would include Kazakh power supplies to China and other countries with China as the transit territory.

In addition, the countries created a joint venture for the production of nuclear fuel. Kazakhstan, the world’s main exporter of uranium, will supply the nuclear centres of China and other countries.

The Chinese and Kazakhs also launched several projects to modernise the coal industry in Kazakhstan to better produce coal, diesel fuel, synthetic natural gas and other chemical products.

The parties also signed intergovernmental documents, including a protocol on amendments to the agreement on the regulation of the “Khorgos” International Centre of Cross-Border Cooperation.

Along with these agreements, memorandums of understanding to deepen cooperation in the nuclear industry were signed between the Kazakh Ministry of Energy and atomic energy authority of China. The Kazakh Ministry of National Economy and Chinese National Development and Reform Commission inked a document to jointly promote the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Li was received by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev in the

ALSTOM doubles its stake in Kazakh locomotive joint venture EKZ

By Danna Bupzhanova

ASTANA – Kazakhstan Railways (KTZ) and ALSTOM signed an agreement Dec. 5 for the latter to purchase an additional 25 percent stake in EKZ, its Kazakh locomotive joint venture. ALSTOM produces power generating and power distribution equipment, rail equipment, streetcars and ship equipment and the move will expand its scope to include maintenance activities through a dedicated facility in Astana, International Railway Journal reports.

“By increasing Alstom’s share in EKZ, we show our confidence in the attractiveness of the Kazakhstan investment environment as we contribute to the development of new expertise and skills locally to address not only Kazakhstan’s needs but also those of the region,” said Martin Vaujour, managing director of Alstom Transport Central Asia. He added that by purchasing an additional stake, Alstom confirmed its dedication to Kazakhstan’s policy of modernising the railway industry. The purchase will increase the company’s holding in EKZ to 50 percent, while KTZ and Transmashholding will both retain 25 percent stakes.

The agreement was signed by KTZ president Askar Mamin and Alstom Transport President Henri Poupart-Lafarge during a visit to Kazakhstan by French President François Hollande. According to the document, EKZ, currently the only producer of electric locomotives in Kazakhstan, will carry out maintenance of KZ8A freight and KZ4 passenger locomotives in Astana under a \$1.6 billion, 25-year contract awarded by KTZ. EKZ will organise production of traction transformers for electric locomotives and become a major foreign supplier of these components for ALSTOM.

EKZ’s plant in Kazakhstan is already assembling locomotives for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) market, with plans to shift complete production to the capital from Alstom’s Belfort facility next year as the company continues to work on a \$1.3 billion contract for 295 locomotives awarded in 2010 and due to be completed by 2020. Twenty-four KZ8A electric locomotives are already in operation in Kazakhstan.

In May, Azerbaijan awarded a contract to EKZ worth \$369.7 million for 50 KZ8A locomotives. Assembly will start in 2016 at the plant in Astana. The 120 km/h lo-

comotives are powered by asynchronous traction motors and are able to haul freight trains weighing up to 9,000 tonnes. Around 40 percent of the ADY rail network is electrified at 3kV DC, but this is being converted to an AC system.

According to the document, EKZ will carry out maintenance of KZ8A freight and KZ4 passenger locomotives in Astana under a \$1.6 billion, 25-year contract awarded by KTZ.

In addition, KTZ subsidiary Locomotive and Electrovoz Kurastyru Zauyty signed two long-term agreements Dec. 5 for locomotive maintenance in cargo passenger traffic. Central Asian Electric Power Corporation (CAEPCO) and ALSTOM Holdings also signed a memorandum of cooperation and understanding on four power supplies for modernisation of electric power, with the total budget of the project exceeding \$369.7 million.

“We have agreed to supply ALSTOM equipment to build new and modernise existing generators for projects in the field of electric power generation. ALSTOM Technology will be used to develop concepts and feasibility studies, including environmental protection. CAEPCO intends to apply the latest technology in its existing facilities and in implementing promising projects in the future,” said CAEPCO Board Chairman Alexander Klebanov.

ALSTOM modern electric locomotive plant in the city was opened by KTZ and ALSTOM in December 2012. The company has produced 24 electric locomotives adapted to Kazakhstan’s operational and climatic conditions. The KZ8A locomotives can reach speeds close to 120 km/h and are considered to be one of the most powerful electric locomotives in the world. The factory also manufactures the KZ4AT locomotive, which successfully passed its first dynamic test at 200 km/h.

Presently, the factory is working on an order to supply freight and passenger locomotives for KTZ by 2020.

latter’s Akorda residence. The host emphasised the two nations have begun projects in the transportation and infrastructure sectors and said a large part of Kazakh petroleum is being produced with Chinese involvement.

During the visit, KazMunayGas and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the state-run natural gas and oil companies, agreed to deepen cooperation in the exploitation of Kazakhstan’s South Kumkol and Kalamkas oil reserves.

Li highlighted that the non-energy sectors with the greatest prospects for Chinese-Kazakh cooperation are mineral resources, machinery manufacturing and agriculture.

Nazarbayev also voiced his approval for the Chinese proposal to create a fund and bank to finance infrastructure projects within the New Silk Road corridor.

During his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed building a Silk Road Economic Belt for the 21st century, a project that is designed to benefit the three billion people who live in Eurasia. The New Silk

Road will be comprised of modern highways, rail lines and oil and gas pipelines. In his speech delivered at Nazarbayev University, Xi suggested that relevant countries enhance communication and show green light for regional economic integration in policy and law.

He proposed that China and Central Asian countries compare notes on their economic development strategies and work together to formulate measures for regional cooperation.

“This has been perhaps one of my most fruitful visits in recent years, as China and Kazakhstan have launched a mutually-beneficial cooperation,” said Li at the conclusion of the trip.

Media reports on the visit suggested that it has proven Beijing is sticking to its strategy of expanding economic cooperation with Kazakhstan through offering financial and other kinds of backing to projects in the energy sector and infrastructure development.

During his visit, Li also attended the 13th prime ministers’ meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

EDITORIAL & OPINIONS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Bidding Farewell to 2014 and Looking Forward to 2015

You are quite likely to be reading this with a fair share of your thoughts occupied with preparations for a Christmas dinner or a New Year's party.

If you are a parent of small children, you might be thinking of where to hide presents you've bought (I hope you've already bought one, haven't you?) before you can place them under the tree while the little ones sleep. Your hope is to make a fairy tale that will last another year.

The New Year's Eve is one of the best childhood memories for almost all of us, and now it is up to us to provide that for the next generation. As probably the happiest time of year, these holidays turn us into kids time and again and bring wishful thinking: making us believe in fairy tales and see the world in lights much rosier than it really is.

Among those who feel the magic of the New Year's Eve is President Nursultan Nazarbayev. His interview with the leading Kazakh TV channels transmitted on the Sunday evening of Dec. 21, a few days after the country celebrated its 23rd Independence Day, illuminated what many feel.

Truly, to some extent, it felt like a kind father or grandfather, a patriarch if you like, sharing intimate thoughts with his large family and spreading serenity. The eight journalists that the President talked to were all quite young, at least no one seemed above thirty-something. They did their job very well, speaking confidently and asking their questions. Nope, not tough. But to the point.

Sure a few might be bemoaning that the President's press service made the selection so as to avoid discomfort of "true journo-types," demanding all truth from the nation's most senior official. Yet, the meeting in the Akorda presidential residence that we saw on TV was not about that. It was about creating an atmosphere for the nation to see once again the President's genuinely human face and to hear his tough but honest advice, not from a public forum's rostrum or as he is reprehending ministers for the shortcomings in their work and slow progress in eliminating corruption, but from a round table with cups of tea on it.

He did well. The young journalists did just the same. They even all sang two songs together, with the President starting. The first one was in Russian from his working class youth years and then a Kazakh folk song. Like at home. Like a family that should stick together when it's cold and windy outside your window.

Sure, the interview was absolutely not all about sweet things.

In fact, the year of 2014 has definitely been one of the toughest years in our part of the world. First of all, this has been the year of bloodshed in the post-Soviet Eurasia's second most populous nation, the lovely Ukraine. What started as a domestic standoff between supporters of two political options has turned into the worst geopolitical confrontation the world has seen since the end of Cold War. Thousands of people have died. The escalated emotions cause people to take sides. This is by far the toughest challenge to Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy that our state has seen in 23 years of independence.

A journalist asked the President about the future of our multi-vector policies. The answer was that the policy has allowed Kazakhstan to create as comfortable conditions for a welfare-oriented economic growth strategy as is possible in one of the toughest regions of the world. President Nazarbayev rightfully pointed out that being "multi-vectorial" is a natural choice for a modern state. Involvement in regional integration and alliances should not prevent us from maintaining truly friendly relations with all neighbours and fellow members of the international community.

However, we live in a harsh reality where tit-for-tat sanctions are having their toll on economic growth in Eurasia. The President said that the sanctions do not impact Kazakhstan directly but "there is nothing good in them for us either." These sanctions are weakening the confidence of businesses and undermining climate for investments. They are not bringing tangible political outcomes either. But they are resulting in decreasing trade and lowering prices for commodities.

"Are we ready?" asked a journalist. He meant the price of oil. The President assured we have the reserves to deflect these difficulties. Plans have been prepared for

what Kazakhstan will do if the price of oil goes down to \$40 per barrel (it is around \$62 today). Now is the time to make best use of our National Fund. But the three billion dollars a year from the \$80 billion worth fund is to be used not on artificially maintaining the rate of tenge and buying commodities to keep an illusion of material well-being in the time of crisis.

Major investments would go into the Nurly Zhol infrastructure development programme. Addressing the journalists, and naturally the viewers, the President said that the roads being constructed and maintained "are going to serve a generation of your children."

"Now is the time to invest the funds we had saved in the development of transport links connecting the regions of Kazakhstan," he noted, admitting that he had been thinking about implementing the strategy over a long time. Yet, now must be the proper moment.

President Nazarbayev is known for timely decisions that have kept him an unchallenged national leader for so many years. Indeed, the end-of-the-year crisis with rouble had shown the timeliness of the President's snap state-of-the-nation address in November and an early 18 percent controlled devaluation of the tenge back in February.

Internationally, Nazarbayev has proven this year once again his commitment to the multi-vector strategy that best serves the interests of the Kazakh economy and people.

On May 29, in Astana he signed a historical agreement on establishing the Eurasian Economic Union, which will be launched in eight days from now and will create a single market of 170 million customers. On Oct. 8 in Brussels, the Kazakh leader confirmed the successful completion of negotiations on a new, enhanced Partnership Cooperation Agreement with the European Union. A week later, Kazakhstan became the 52nd member of the prestigious Asia – Europe Meeting (ASEM) Forum, the third Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country to join after Russia and Ukraine. And the end of the year sees reports that key negotiations are complete on the way to Kazakhstan's accession to the World Trade Organisation.

Still, the world around is no dear. 2014 saw the rise of an extremely violent terrorist group, the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). With all the positives of the worldwide web, its opportunities allow even the marginal groups to propagate skilfully their ideologies, including the most malicious ones. The Internet helped disseminate images and messages of a few dozen. Kazakhstan's National Security Committee says there are around 300 of Kazakhs at war in Syria. These, unfortunately, include children who have been shown training for future fighting. The truth is, and the experts say, that there are many more Westerners and citizens of other states of Central Asia and Muslim-majority countries. "They all [fight] there for money," Nazarbayev said. The "Jihadist" agents manipulate people that got into some kind of hardship. Indeed, they urge the men to join their ranks, and then use them as gun fodder, keeping their wives and children and poisoning their minds as well.

"I address our youth: it is better to keep far from this evil," the President urged. "We should spread a true understanding of Islam," he added, stressing that the very meaning of Islam was peace.

Now on the eve of 2015, this is what each of us would value most – the peace and well-being of our families and children. And each of us knows: wishful thinking is not enough. Hard work should follow.

There is an argument that every generation should prove it is a decent heir to its predecessors. As the nation will be celebrating 550 years of Kazakh statehood and 70 years of the defeat of Nazism in Europe, to which people of Kazakhstan had made their invaluable input, it is time to prove ourselves. To prove that we are ready for 2015 and we are ready to face any challenge the future might bring.

But for now, it is all about the New Year's Eve. A fairly tale. Let it last, at least a week or two.

And then, straight ahead to hard work, with confidence, competence and courage.

Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year, dear friends!

Nuclear Weapons Race Should Stop

By Karipbek Kuyukov

The recent 3rd International Conference on Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons has shown an encouraging trend – the growing realisation by the world community of the urgent need to take more robust steps towards nuclear disarmament. Even more encouraging was the fact that among the 158 countries represented in Vienna earlier in December were three nuclear weapon states. And what gives yet more hope is that the civil society globally has taken on a more active role in campaigning for the elimination of nuclear weapons and its role has not only been recognised but welcomed by governments throughout the world.

And it is about time. After the end of the Cold War, and the constant fear of the global nuclear war that accompanied it, we had all hoped that those days were in the past.

But in recent months, we have seen a disturbing revival of tensions between the West and Russia. There is talk of a return to Cold War brinkmanship and even development of new nuclear weapons. The slow but steady progress made towards ending the nuclear threat is in danger of being reversed. We should stop the nuclear arms race and step back from this precipice.

As leaders, diplomats and activists consider their options in these trying times, it is critical to remember the terrible human and environmental costs of nuclear weapons – costs which Kazakhstan still suffers every day.

I was born 100 kilometres from the epicentre of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site where the Soviet Union exploded more than 600 nuclear devices between 1949 and 1991. My parents and thousands of others would watch those bright and vast mushroom clouds as they filled the sky. The tests have had terrible physical consequences for the people who lived near them.

I came into this world without arms. People often ask me if I can be sure that radiation was the cause. If you had lived in my home town or region, you would not ask be asking me that question.

In the place where I grew up, I saw mothers and midwives shocked at the sight of their babies. My own mother didn't see me for three days. When she did, she was in shock for a long time. She couldn't even speak. But I wasn't the only one. I saw families too embarrassed to show their children to the outside world, hiding them deep

inside their homes and bringing them out only briefly for fresh air and sun.

I witnessed families and whole communities decimated by radiation-related cancers. As the United Nations confirms, more than 1.5 million people in Kazakhstan have suffered the effects of Soviet nuclear weapons testing.

The most terrifying fact about this story is that we didn't understand the impact these explosions would have. We were taken completely by surprise – and this, I believe, is why it is so important that we use every opportunity to remind the world of the dangers of nuclear testing and the horror of the weapons themselves.

I saw so much tragedy and suffering in my homeland that I decided to do everything possible to ensure that my generation is the last to suffer such damage. I became an activist in an anti-nuclear weapons movement and found peace in expressing my pain through art.

I use my feet and mouth to hold my brush and pour out in my own colours my inner world, calling on others to follow my cause. Today, I am an honorary ambassador of The ATOM Project, a global education and online petition campaign to encourage the global leadership needed to totally eliminate the nuclear "sword of Damocles" from above our heads.

My work with The ATOM Project, and before that with the Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement, has served as a constant reminder that Kazakhstan was not alone in its suffering. I have witnessed the tears falling from the eyes of mothers from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I have participated in town hall meetings and protests at the Nevada test site in the United States. I have listened to the sad stories of the families of those who tested nuclear weapons for the British at Christmas Island. I have seen the fear in the eyes of parents across the world who are too ashamed to let others see their own children. I know that fear.

But over the last two decades we have seen progress. Even before Kazakhstan became fully independent, President Nursultan Nazarbayev shut down the Semipalatinsk test site in 1991 in defiance of then Soviet government in Moscow. On independence, our country voluntarily gave up the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal which we had inherited. Similar courageous decisions were taken by Ukraine, Belarus and South Africa who all renounced their nuclear weap-



ons or nuclear weapons programmes.

In 1996, a major step was taken when the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was adopted by the United Nations. It has since been signed by 183 countries and ratified by 162. But the treaty cannot enter into force until it is signed and ratified by eight more countries: China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States. These countries must send a clear message to the world that nuclear weapons are part of our past, and have no place in our future. They must ensure that not one more person suffers from the consequences of nuclear testing and nuclear weapons use in the future.

I weep when I hear those calling for a return of nuclear weapons. I fear for our planet when I read news stories about countries re-building their nuclear arsenals. After all the horror, all the fear, and all the danger have we learnt nothing? How many more, like me, must suffer? I have a vision: to make sure that every single person around me knows what was concealed for decades – the consequences of developing nuclear weapons.

That is my mission. I don't have arms. I can't know what it feels like to grasp someone by the hand. But I do have feet with which I can paint. I have a voice that enables me to speak. For as long as I can, I will use whatever I have to tell the world about the catastrophic damage nuclear weapons have done to the planet and all who share it. And for as long as I can, I will encourage everybody to join us in our campaign for a total eradication of these most horrible weapons and for a world free from fear of nuclear annihilation.

The author is the Honorary Ambassador of The ATOM Project.

Professionalism, Motivation Behind Finland's Success as Peacemaker, Ahtisaari Says

By Ilyas Omarov

HELSINKI – As Finland celebrated the Day of the Peacemaker last month, The Astana Times interviewed former President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari to talk about his country's experience and his views on the role of the United Nations in the modern world.

Finland's ability to resolve conflicts is considered one of your country's most valuable skills. In November, Finland celebrates Day of the Peacemaker, which bears your name. How did this idea come up?

I recall one early morning five years ago, when the foreign minister at the time, our current prime minister, Alexander Stubb, came to my office. The day before, he had received a task from a Finnish brand committee to start organising an annual event of peace, mediation and reconciliation. He kindly asked if I had nothing against [calling the festival] the Ahtisaari Days. And I did not. But I had two conditions: I wished that the celebrations would be inclusive and open to as many people as possible, and that they would keep a high standard. I am glad to see that my wish is being respected. This year, we suc-

cessfully celebrated Ahtisaari Days for the fourth time.

What is the secret to Finland's success as a country-mediator?

The strength of Finland in peace-keeping has been its voluntary character: most of the people joining the missions are recruited from reservists and are therefore volunteers to the task. Therefore, they are usually highly motivated and bring with them also the expertise they have acquired in their civil professions, such as engineering, policing or nursing. The Finnish peacekeepers have also been successful in organising civil-military cooperation in the field. As a small European country, Finland is seen as impartial and acting without any particular agenda. This background, for its part, has made Finland a trusted partner also in terms of mediation, which is a newer field and where Finland is currently deepening its skills, together with nongovernmental partners.

We are well aware of your active work within the United Nations. What future does the UN have?

While acknowledging the fact that the United Nations is still needed – maybe even more than ever – we have to be frank and forward-looking. Old



Martti Ahtisaari

tools and approaches are not always enough in solving current complex crises. The United Nations has proved its flexibility and willingness to adapt to the changing nature of conflicts, but we should be able to do more. Fragile societies and states need support on all possible fronts; while many non-state actors can be beneficial in this work, the United Nations has to be able to do more. My years with the United Nations have given me great confidence in the capacity of the organisation as an irreplaceable instrument in solving problems and conflicts and I have always maintained that cooperation of the permanent members of the Security Council is vital in solving conflicts.

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OPINIONS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Increasing Efficiency in Kazakhstan's Public Sector with a Shared Service Model

By Maximilian Foedingler

The Civil Service Reform Project, an EU-funded project with an overall budget of 4.6 million euros, has delivered seminars on best practices in civil service management in several regions of Kazakhstan. The latest event took place in Karaganda, where more than 60 participants representing the human resources units of local authorities joined the event. In addition to learning about the experiences of European countries, the participants also got a taste of how the newly developed E-Kyzmet System will ease the daily routines of human resource managers.

Imagine needing a day off from work due to an urgent personal need, needing documents confirming employment or just wanting a holiday on short notice. In most cases, an employee would have to spend considerable time waiting for approval, making snap decisions quite difficult. Procedures in different human resources departments also differ, even when the same law has to be applied. Human resource management operated manually is complicated and hard to handle in an efficient way.

New developments in this sphere allow not only for faster decisions and more effective operation, but also increase the flexibility and comfort of each civil servant. Making human resource



management effective and efficient, increasing the comfort of civil servants and giving public human resource managers more time for tasks beyond their routines was paramount for the design.

The preparation of E-Kyzmet was supported by the EU funded project Civil Service Reform and Modernisation of the Government of Kazakhstan in order to have comprehensive and precise terms of reference for selecting the best vendor.

According to international experience, the success of a project is already determined in the preparation phase, and missing functionalities that must be implemented when the project is already in the roll-out phase can result in significantly increased budgets. In almost all countries that have introduced information

technology-based human resource systems, the first attempt failed. This, according to officials, was an important lesson learned. One of the failures that occurred frequently was underestimating the human factor. Generally said, the projects were seen as purely technical, presenting users with a final product without preparing them for the coming changes. Resistance was thus built up and in some cases, implementation was delayed.

Knowing this, the Centre of Personnel Management, which is responsible for the implementation, organised four events in 2014 to present the functionality and progress of E-Kyzmet to civil servants all over Kazakhstan. It is planned to continue with similar events throughout next year, to cover all regions.

So what is E-Kyzmet about? E-Kyzmet is a country-wide IT-based system, aimed at automating generic human resources processes in all public bodies on the national, regional and local levels. The system operates in Kazakh and Russian, either of which can be chosen by the user.

Functions like onboarding new employees, administering professional documents and planning leave time are only a few of the features of the system. Civil servants will be able to execute those and other processes on short notice if required, saving tremen-

dous time and resources. In addition, they can concentrate on more important strategic tasks, having been relieved of the manual administrative burden.

E-Kyzmet is a country-wide IT-based system, aimed at automating generic human resources processes in all public bodies on the national, regional and local levels.

The system will be operated centrally and provide the connected authorities with requested data on a secure, closed data line. This should guarantee a maximum of security for stored information. Since most of the available systems are cloud based and therefore not suitable for sensitive governmental data, this was taken into consideration while selecting a company.

Analogous systems are already used by the European Commission and other institutions of the European Union, and some national governments have already implemented a shared service model.

The most prominent example of shared service is probably the

Dutch system, P-Direkt. P-Direkt started its operation in 2005 and now represents the state of the art in the operation and planning of a shared service model for human resource management in the public sector.

How much the Dutch government spent on P-Direkt is not known to the public, but the result is: The system is planned to reduce expenditures by at least 500 million euros between 2004 and 2015 by decreasing excess labour and the duplication of functions. Furthermore, P-Direkt consolidates dispersed expertise over several human resource departments in ministries. By concentrating expertise in one organisation, the Dutch government became more efficient and could react more quickly to requests from their employees. The unified standards also bring more coherence to service delivery.

Further, the hope was that line managers would benefit. They were dissatisfied with the service they received because human resource advisers were devoting up to a third of their time to administration instead of support and partnering. The outsourcing and pooling of standard human resource procedures gave advisers more time to focus on more complex issues, like finding the right person for the right job and career planning. After implementing P-Direkt, services were felt to have

improved and job satisfaction increased.

The old way of working, the way that human resource services were delivered to managers and employees changed dramatically with the implementation of shared services. The shared services model puts managers and employees in the driver's seat. Everyone affected by the transformation has to let go of old ways of working and shift to a new way of looking at human resource services.

After the introduction is before the introduction – this important lesson was taught to the Kazakh delegation visiting P-Direkt. Only the constant development of the system keeps its momentum going. P-Direkt wants to always increase user satisfaction; the next stage of P-Direkt will be smart phone and tablet access.

Usability was and always will be the most crucial factor in such systems, and one of the key lessons learned, therefore, is that modern human resources services should come to the people and not vice versa. P-Direkt saves around 51 million euros of public money annually, of which 34 million is personnel costs, 15 million IT costs and 2 million other costs – an impressive amount of taxpayer money that now can be used for other meaningful goals.

The author is a key expert of the European Union Project "Civil Service Reform and Modernisation of the Government of Kazakhstan."

Hollande's Visit to Kazakhstan: Education in Focus, Finally

By Aziz Burhanov

French President François Hollande visited Astana and Almaty on Dec. 5-6. This is the third visit of a French president to Kazakhstan, after François Mitterrand in 1993 and Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009.

These visits roughly reflect the dynamics of French relations with Central Asia. It seems that after an initial fascination culminated with Mitterrand's visit to Kazakhstan in September 1993, French interest in the region went into decline, except for a short boost during the anti-Taliban campaign in Afghanistan. In the past few years, however, we see a reengagement of France with Central Asia, with Sarkozy visiting Kazakhstan in 2009 and Hollande in 2014. I studied French policy towards post-Soviet Central Asia back in the early 2000s during my



time at the University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas and I recall that at that time France was still trying to figure out what Central Asia could offer to France and vice versa.

Of course, speaking in economic terms, France remains one of the largest foreign investors in Kazakhstan and is largely present in the country's oil and gas sector. Total, the French energy major,

is involved in the North Caspian Operating Company as well as in the giant Kashagan oil field exploration. Several dozen French companies operate in Kazakhstan, including Alcatel-Lucent, Alstom, Areva, Vicat, GDF-Suez, Danone, Maury, Sanofi-Aventis, la Société Générale, Thales, Total, Schlumberger, Thales Engineering Kazakhstan and Ifastar Rollers. This is all very important, indeed. There is, however, one area where France possesses a major resource that remains largely underused – that is education and culture.

Back in my student days, learning the French language and going to France for studies was considered somewhat outlandish, exotic and at times even bizarre compared to the "mainstream" outflow of students to the United States, United Kingdom and Germany. Even today, although the situation

has improved, France still significantly lags behind in numbers of young Kazakhs choosing French universities for their studies. This is why it is a particular pleasure to see that besides political and economic issues, this visit also focused on education. I'm pleased to see that during his visit to Kazakhstan, Hollande took part in the educational forum and in the grand opening of the Sorbonne-Kazakhstan Institute campus in Almaty. The Alliance Française is expanding its operations across the country, making learning the French language more accessible.

New initiatives are offered to French students and scholars interested in Central Asia. I hope that this, along with the facilitated visa regime, will bring more French students to the region and help to establish new contacts and expand existing ones. I believe that

connections between peoples and countries become stronger not just through a general fascination about a country, but through those personal contacts, interactions and friendships.

I hope all this will help to keep the prestige of French education among younger generations of Kazakhs and more students will pursue their studies there.

Back in the day, when France still had a compulsory military service, some young Frenchmen had an option and preferred to go abroad (including Kazakhstan) to teach

the French language and promote French culture. This programme tremendously helped me and many other young Kazakhs to improve their French language skills and make a choice in favour of studying in France. I hope all this will help to keep the prestige of French education among younger generations of Kazakhs and more students will pursue their studies there.

I'm also pleased to hear that a new, direct flight between Astana and Paris will be launched in March 2015. I recall that an intergovernmental agreement on this was signed back in 1993. It took a good 22 years for this wonderful initiative to actually happen. One would only hope that future cooperation initiatives will not have to wait that long.

The author is a PhD and Assistant Professor at Nazarbayev University.

The Kazakh Journey to Success: Turning Great Games into Great Gains

By C. Naseer Ahmad

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, so said the Chinese philosopher Laozi. He was a wise man. For those who heeded his advice, successful journeys along the famous "Silk Road," the vast trade network started during the Han Dynasty, amassed many fortunes. The thousands of miles across Central Asia provide bountiful opportunities once again for those willing to take the first steps.

"Location, location and location," said a wise woman at a recent event in Washington, DC. She ought to know: after all, Madeline Albright travelled the journey to the pinnacle of success as the UN Ambassador and later the US Secretary of State. Secretary Albright provided lucid arguments backed by undeniable facts about the strategic importance of Kazakhstan – based on her personal experience.

For any journey, you have to start somewhere. The intellectual journey – "Working together for a Secure Future," the theme of the 2nd annual Kazakhstan-US Convention could not have begun at a better place. The historic Willard Intercontinental was the site



of the Peace Congress in 1861, where President Abraham Lincoln stayed before the inauguration, where General Ulysses S. Grant hung his hat after the successful effort to preserve the Union and end the bloody Civil War, where Julia Ward Howe wrote the lyrics to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and where Martin Luther King wrote his "I have a dream" speech.

The dreams and aspirations of a young nation like Kazakhstan were articulated well by Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov in his opening remarks. "My country remains a staunch supporter of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation," said Ambassador Kairat Umarov

in his message entitled "Shared Goals."

Closer and increasingly dynamic are US-Kazakhstan ties. It is a view espoused by Furkan Kosar, President of the Council of Turkic American Associations, and shared widely among the participants of the conferences as well as the speakers. Promoting purpose driven ties is the idea honed well by Fred Kempe, President, the Atlantic Council, who moderated a thoughtful session featuring speakers such as Anne Harrington, Deputy Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration and Dan Pone-man, former Deputy Secretary of Energy with a deep understanding of both the history of Kazakhstan, the region as well as the challenges and opportunities that exist along every mile.

The reward for good work is more work, said Richard E. Hoagland, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, US Department of State. Stated another way, the journey towards success along the "new Silk Road" will take continuous and unrelenting steps towards progress.

The journey towards success along the "new Silk Road" will take continuous and unrelenting steps towards progress.

Sidebar conversations provide useful insights often. During a conversation over coffee, a retired US Agency of International Development (USAID) executive said: "President Nazarbayev is a wise man" and went on to explain the wisdom of the decisions taken at the inception – the birth of modern Kazakhstan – and in the subsequent years to steer the country forward with a multi-vectored foreign policy and a domestic policy measured to the conditions in the world economy. "What a difference a year makes," he continued to acknowledge the increase in confidence compared to the conference last year. His words mattered more because he was not selling anything.

Conference speeches are ex-

tremely beneficial as they educate us about things we did not know before. Good speakers engage our minds and motivate us but nothing touches our hearts more than a man who physically cannot touch us because he has no arms. If you spoke to Karipbek Kuyukov, the gifted artist who paints with his feet, like I did a couple of years ago in this very building on Kazakhstan's National Day, you would understand the wisdom of President Nazarbayev in taking his country on a path toward progress as long distance travelers cannot afford to be weighed down by distractions or terrible risks to their people.

Talking to the youth is both refreshing and beneficial because through their prism one gets the glimpse of the future. The visiting Rumsfeld scholars from Kazakhstan as well as other Central Asian countries provide us their views of the future from their research papers and conference presentation. The most useful insight, however, came over a coffee with a bright young Kazakh wrapping up her internship in Washington. Neither the Stalinist era repression faced by her Korean grandparents nor losing her mother at age nine nor

the hardships faced by her father of Ukrainian origin left any scars of resentment. Quite the opposite, the cheerful demeanor translates so well in her LinkedIn page with the simple goal "to be a part of an innovative organisation, where I can utilise my scholastic, finance, and analytical background to help people rise out of poverty and become self-sufficient."

The prospects of reaching the journey along the new Silk Road and to reach the goals of Kazakhstan 2050 become brighter by the day with Karipbek Kuyukov and Yelena for they have the fire in the belly that despair cannot extinguish. They are the ones who will keep Kazakhstan linked in – not landlocked. And, they are the foot soldiers who will help turn great games into great gains for Kazakhstan and the region in this journey to success – step by step.

The author writes for the Diplomatic Courier and Pakistan-Link and is a member of the Boards of the Embassy Series and Interfaith Voices, a National Public Radio programme. He is a member of the National Press Club in Washington, DC.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

New Italian Ambassador Seeks to Diversify Long-Standing Ties

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – Stefano Ravagnan, Italy's new ambassador in Astana, has plans to reinforce and formalise his country's long-standing engagement with Kazakhstan, expanding the two countries' traditional energy links into increased trade and richer cultural and people-to-people ties.

The ambassador, who arrived at the end of August, acknowledges that energy is the base of the relationship. "Energy is essential, of course," he said in an interview on Dec. 2. "We have more or less 10 percent of our oil coming from Kazakhstan, so it's quite an important part of our energy consumption." Italy is Kazakhstan's third-largest trade partner, following only China and Russia.

Italy's energy multinational, Eni, has had a presence in Kazakhstan since 1992, and during Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's June visit inked a new deal with KazMunayGas to explore the Caspian Sea's Issatay exploration area. The new agreement shows that the complications of the delayed Kashagan



Stefano Ravagnan

oil project haven't curbed Italy's appetite for Kazakh oil, the ambassador said.

"I think it's proof that there's not a loss of enthusiasm. Of course, Kashagan is a complicated issue, there were all these technical problems," Ravagnan said. "But the oil here – you have a lot of oil. But it's not the Emirates or Qatar; it's not the easiest oil. So we have to reset the plans."

There is also room for expansion. "I think our goal should be diversifying our presence," the ambassador said. "I think that we

can enlarge the portfolio of our people."

The ambassador has set several priorities for diversifying his country's activities in Kazakhstan, the first of which is to establish a trade office in Astana. Italy's trade office is in Almaty, but during the Kazakh-Italian Business Forum in Astana in mid-November, it was decided to open a second office in the capital. "One of the main results [of the forum] is that our deputy minister acknowledged that we have to be more present in Astana," Ravagnan said. "This is my first goal: to have structural reinforcement, which is badly needed."

"I was impressed by the presentation made by KazNex during this business delegation," the ambassador noted. "I mean, of course you have to promote ... but you also have data, and numbers are numbers, and when you see these numbers, put together, one after the other – frankly speaking, it's quite surprising, the results. ... I think that everyone was really impressed by that."

Ravagnan also wants to make cultural exchanges between the two

nations more frequent and formalised. "The second goal will be to have higher level cultural activity, which as of now is mainly autonomously organised by institutions here, like Astana Opera. ... From our side, we're not in a condition to organise big things because of resource issues. We don't have so many state resources, but we have many enterprises and sponsors, so [my goal is] to organise a few big events – two or three in a year, no more – but to have a real impact, more than having small things here and there."

This includes arranging exchanges of art and history exhibits. "I'd really like to organise a good Kazakh exhibition in Italy," Ravagnan said. "There are very interesting things [in Astana's national museum] that I think would fit the Italian taste." The exchange would go both ways, of course: Ravagnan has his eye on a collection of Roman sculptures he thinks would be interesting to Kazakhstan's museum-goers.

Despite appearances, Ravagnan says, he's not a centraliser. "I think that culture should be as much as

possible people-to-people, without embassies, ministries, whatever. But at the same time, we cannot be completely absent. Our role should be to give a stimulus," he said.

The flow of information is about to get such a stimulus. The Italian news agency AGI has just begun to employ a correspondent here for what Ravagnan thinks is the first time in 20 years. "The flow of information is absolutely limited," he said. "This is another goal, to have a better presence in the press here."

He also hopes to deepen the teaching of Italian language and culture. "Abylai Khan University offered to work on an Italian institute, so I jumped on that offer and now I'm working on that," Ravagnan said. "Because the teaching of Italian here is very weak." With teachers spread across the country and English the main foreign language being promoted, the Italian language must change strategy. "I think that the only possibility is to have a kind of stronghold. A point of excellence, where you teach not only language but culture. ... Of course, it takes time, but this is a priority," he said.

So things are changing between the two partners. A new stage is coming, driven by Kazakhstan's evolving strategies and the general opening of the country, Ravagnan predicted. Russia's economic problems and political conflict with Western countries and the ongoing situation in Ukraine are in some ways playing in Kazakhstan's favour, he said, adding that there's "a renewed interest in Kazakhstan."

Kazakhstan's own economic progress is also, of course, a main driver of interest. "At the end of the first stage of the State Programme of Accelerated Industrial and Innovative Development, in a sense, it's a time of results – and the results are very positive. Of course, not everything is fine ... but when you present to the Italian business world the achievements of this country over the past five years, also considering that we don't have anything comparable in terms of growth of gross domestic product, of course, they are absolutely astonished. In a sense, I think it's a bit of a rediscovery of this relationship," Ravagnan said.

Kazakh President Visits Kiev to Re-boost Ties

Continued from Page A1

The presidents noted with satisfaction the implementation of current and future bilateral projects in the fields of innovation and high technology, higher and vocational education.

"Twenty years passed since the signing of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between our countries. From 2010 to 2013 our mutual trade had doubled. This year this number has fallen, which does not correspond to the existing potential, because Ukraine is an important trade and economic partner of Kazakhstan," Nazarbayev said addressing Poroshenko.

"Kazakhstan widely uses Ukrainian agricultural and municipal machinery. Food is being imported and exported. The volume of trade that amounted to US\$4 billion, [this year] fell by a third. However, we have the opportunity to return to previous levels," he added.

Following the negotiations, the two countries have agreed on the intensification of cooperation in energy, mechanical engineering, aircraft, space and military-technical spheres. Nazarbayev expressed interest in the Ukrainian experience of building armoured vehicles.

"The experience and potential of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex will be used to increase

defence capability of Kazakhstan," Poroshenko said.

According to Poroshenko's press service, the parties discussed the opportunity of combining capacities of the Ukrainian space enterprises, namely Pivdenne, Pivdenmash and Khartron, with the Kazakh ones, including Baikonur Cosmodrome.

Nazarbayev has called the cooperation in the sphere of energy mechanical engineering the most promising, particularly, in the context of using the products of Turboatom, Zaporizhtransformator, Zoria-Mashproekt for the construction of energy facilities in Kazakhstan. Ukrainian agricultural machinery and products also enjoy great demand in Kazakhstan.

The interlocutors also reached an agreement on the supply of coal from Karaganda and Ekibastuz coal basins to Ukraine, which is short on coal due to disruption in supplies from the eastern, conflict-torn part of the country.

Poroshenko expressed his sincere gratitude to Nazarbayev for his care for Ukraine.

"Thank you for immediate response to my invitation to come and support us in a very difficult time. I personally, the government and the Ukrainian people highly appreciate it. Indeed, we believe that the potential of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Kazakhstan is not used to the fullest.

It is essential that relevant bodies conduct a serious work on this aspect," he said.

In turn, Nazarbayev noted that he supports all measures aimed at peaceful resolution of the situation in and around Ukraine. He said he supports peaceful initiatives aimed at de-escalation of the armed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

"Now is the time to move from confrontation to compromise and to rebuild economic ties based on this," Nazarbayev said. "The current situation benefits no one. We have friendly relations with all countries, and together with you we can work on this issue. I hope we can find some solutions and coordinate our actions."

According to the Kazakh foreign ministry, Astana has been working towards normalisation of relations between Russia, Ukraine and the West. For this reason in order to start a dialogue on the Ukrainian crisis, Kazakhstan has worked with other countries to organise the meeting of leaders of the three countries of the Customs Union, Ukraine and the European Union in Minsk on Aug. 26.

There Nazarbayev called for all parties involved to refrain from using force and instead to address the challenges through diplomatic channels. The Kazakh leader urged to immediately resolve the humanitarian catastrophe in the east of Ukraine. He also called to ensure a large-scale humanitar-

ian aid campaign to assist Ukrainian people, adding that the efforts should be supported by international organisations, including the Customs Union and the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States].

In the framework of cooperation with international organisations, Kazakhstan provided \$40,000 to support activity of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, which paid special attention to realisation of agreements to stop hostilities. In October, Kazakhstan allocated \$30,000 as a direct contribution for Ukraine's humanitarian needs to the International Committee of the Red Cross. And on Dec. 19, the government of Kazakhstan passed a resolution allocating 69,727,875 tenge (US\$377,000) worth of humanitarian assistance to eastern Ukraine, including canned meat, sugar, buckwheat, and vegetable oil.

On the sidelines of the Minsk summit in August, Poroshenko held his first bilateral meeting with Nazarbayev. At that time Poroshenko expressed hope for maintaining strong bilateral coopera-

tion with Kazakhstan and thanked Nazarbayev for support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

During the Dec. 22 talks in Kiev, Nazarbayev and Poroshenko paid particular attention to the role of 330,000-strong Ukrainian Diaspora in Kazakhstan that acts as a "living bridge" linking the two countries by cultural and family ties.

The Kazakh leader also highlighted opportunities offered by the State Programme of Accelerated Industrial and Innovative Development, and the main directions of the Nurly Zhol new economic policy, and invited the Ukrainian business to participate in future projects within these programmes.

The two presidents also noted that in 2013 Kiev successfully hosted the Days of Kazakhstan's Culture. The Days of Ukrainian Culture are planned to be held next year in Astana. One of the significant events of the culture days will be celebrations devoted to the 200th anniversary of the great Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko and the opening of his monument in Astana.

During his visit, Nazarbayev also met with Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk to discuss the current situation and prospects of development of the Kazakh-Ukrainian relations.

"According to the accepted agreement on free trade zone in the CIS, we should develop economic ties. Intergovernmental commission will work between our two countries. There is a Business Forum planned to be held for Kazakh and Ukrainian businessmen, so that they could find common ground," Nazarbayev said.

Yatsenyuk noted that Ukraine and Kazakhstan have had close economic and political relations for a long time.

"We have two main areas of cooperation: trade and energy. This is where we can and must succeed. I am convinced that our bilateral economic cooperation should only improve, since the [current] figures are not the best. If we take the right and clear decisions aimed at increasing turnover, it will benefit both of our countries" Yatsenyuk said.

Nazarbayev Helps Launch Last Section of Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway

By Azamat Kaiyr and Danna Buzephanova

INCHEBURUN STATION, IRAN – In a major development with implications for regional trade and global politics, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran launched a railway line connecting the three countries at a grandiose ceremony on the border crossing between Turkmenistan and Iran on Dec. 3.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani participated in the opening of the 928-kilometre Uzen-Bereket-Gorgan railway stressing the importance of the new line for their economies but also for reconnecting, across the land and by rail, the areas that were once connected by the caravans moving along the Great Silk Road. The line allows

direct delivery of goods along the shortest path among the states, but it also allows for land transportation of goods from the region to China and the Far East.

"Due to the laying of the railway in the direction of the Persian Gulf, the trade turnover this year [already] increased by 38 percent. It is an unprecedented event. We have a lot of reserves for developing cooperation and should use them for the benefit of our people," Nazarbayev said. On Dec. 2, he conducted an official visit to Turkmenistan first and later moved to the border crossing between Turkmenistan and Iran to witness, together with his two counterparts, the opening of the Turkmen-Iranian (Bereket-Gorgan) section, the last part of the railway.

By launching the railway, the three states created a new Silk Road, achieving the three main goals of creating new jobs, enhancing trade cooperation and de-

veloping transit potential, the Kazakh President added.

"The importance of regional markets will now grow for our countries, as will the production oriented towards the Asian markets," Nazarbayev added.

The joint declaration to build the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway was signed by the leaders of the three states on Oct. 16, 2007, with construction kicking off in 2009. The 146 kilometres of Kazakhstan's section were finished first in 2012; the following year it was linked to Kyzylgaa-Bereket, the Turkmen section. Through the combined effort, the three states built a more than 900-kilometre railway line from the Kazakh steppes, across the Karakum Desert in Turkmenistan and into the mountainous province of Golestan in northern Iran. The project was implemented with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank.



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Nation&Capital

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

CULTURE

Ayrau Folk Instrument Orchestra Performs in Paris

B3

SOCIETY

Kazakh Government, Civil Society Discuss New Bill on NGOs

B5

SPORTS

Kazakh Wins Women's Mogul Freestyle World Cup in Finland

B7

ATOM Project Inspires Participants at Int'l Anti-Nuclear Weapons Conference

By Yelden Sarybay

VIENNA – While attending the third International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna Dec. 8-9, artist Karipbek Kuyukov made a lasting impression on delegates from all over the world.

More than 700 officials from 158 countries, as well as activists from non-governmental organisations and the mass media attended the two-day conference. The difference between this conference and the earlier ones in Oslo in March 2013 and Nayarit, Mexico, in February 2014, was that three out of five recognised nuclear weapon states were represented in the Austrian capital, including China, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Participants were treated to a special showing of Kuyukov's mobile exhibition and a timeline presentation of Kazakhstan's nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

"My parents were live witnesses to the nuclear testing that had been conducted at the Soviet Union's Semipalatinsk nuclear test site for over 40 years. They watched as the mushroom clouds formed in the air and the soil flew up into the stratosphere," Kuyukov, who serves as the Honorary Ambassador of The ATOM Project, said in sharing his tragic past. "I have seen many children born with deformations. My own parents had



Honorary Ambassador of The ATOM Project Karipbek Kuyukov (l), helped by an interpreter, recounted his life story in his speeches in Vienna at the civil society and governmental conferences in Vienna on Dec. 7 and 9, drawing applause and support from the audiences.

two children who didn't live to be one year old. I want to ask you, dear delegates, how can you allow for these weapons to exist?"

Kuyukov, a victim of the nuclear

testing at Semipalatinsk, was born without arms, but manages to express his creativity through painting with his mouth and feet. He travels throughout the world on behalf of

The ATOM Project and speaks out against nuclear weapons, calling on everyone to ban them for good.

Continued on Page B2

Patriots of the Year Award Recipients Announced in Astana

By Shynar Ospanova

ASTANA – More than 400 representatives of government, non-governmental and youth organisations, the Parliament of Kazakhstan, culture, sports and the Kazakhstan 2050 National Movement attended a recent ceremony to name the country's Patriots of the Year.

The ceremony honours those who have achieved outstanding success in their profession: athletes, artists, scientists and civil society leaders. This year's awardees include surgeon Bolatbek Baimakhanov, who introduced a surgical stroke treatment, as well as a treatment therapy for pathologies of cerebral vessels, and Damel Mektepbayeva, who is a winner of international com-

petitions Global Impact Compitit, Startup Chile and Startup Mexico. Her project placed fifth in a recent competition in South Korea.

Police officer Ruslan Nurgozhayev also received the award for saving a man from a pit of hot water along with Ruslan Riskulov, who, while on vacation, helped get people to safety after a 15-metre high dam burst. Timur Zhu-

kabayev, who saved the life of a soldier who accidentally dropped a grenade while training in 2009, was also awarded the honour.

Among culture and sports representatives, the award was given to Nurlan Alimzhanov, a famous Kazakh singer and actor, as well as to weightlifter Zhasulan Kydyrbayev, who won a gold medal at the 2014 weightlifting world championships.

Assyrian Community in Kazakhstan Survived Dark Times, Now Focuses on Education

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Among the numerous nationalities that live in Kazakhstan, there is a very small community that has lived through some of history's darkest times to preserve their language and cultural heritage. Today, there are only about 350 of them left in the country. Their origins lie in historical Mesopotamia, the birthplace of the ancient civilisation that evolved into the world we know today.

In an exclusive interview with The Astana Times, 76-year-old Nelly Bit-Suleiman, deputy chairwoman of the Assyrian Cultural Centre in Almaty, shared just a glimpse of the incredible story that made a once-mighty nation disperse throughout the world in search of a refuge – a refuge that Kazakhstan offered willingly in times of great challenges.

"[Assyrians] have been living in Kazakhstan since 1950. Our homeland was on the territory of modern Iraq. The whole area of the Tigris and Euphrates river banks was populated by Assyrians," Bit-Suleiman said.

Today, that ancient territory has become part of several countries: northern Iraq, southeast Turkey and northeast Syria.

Continued on Page B2



Girls in ethnic costumes show the traditional Assyrian flag of their community.

Spanish FC Astana 1964 Director Develops Football in Kazakhstan, Feels at Home in the Country

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Miquel Riera, the international sport director of FC (Football Club) Astana 1964, seeks to promote Kazakh players in Europe, especially in Spain. He has worked as a football agent for many teams in Europe and represented many players in the European leagues.

The Astana Times recently interviewed the Spaniard to identify his future objectives for the team.

How did you get the job in Astana?

I have been representing Dramane Kone, an African player on the team, for the last three years, so for that reason I have (established a good rapport) with the president (of the club) during this period. I have been inside professional football for the last 10 years (as a professional football agent. During this period, I have represented big teams like Shakhtar Donetsk, Dynamo Kiev, Galatasaray, Betis and RCD Mallorca, for example and many players from the national teams like Geremi (Real Madrid/Chelsea).

What achievements do you have to date in coaching or playing?

I was in Astana for four months this year to watch, to teach and to prepare the most talented players from the academies for our football team. I followed them all this time, I chose (with my president) the best talent from our children and we prepared them following the Spanish methodology. My target is to promote the Astana children's academies in Europe and especially in Spain, find opportunities for the best children to test with a professional football team in Spain and to create and organise

the structure of professional academies in the club.

What is the prospective of your team today in Kazakhstan?

My team in Astana wants to become an important team, not only in Kazakhstan but also in Europe. Our project with the children in Kazakhstan is pioneering and we (have) succeeded at the moment in only one year of the project. Of course, to complete this nice target we need at least three or five years to see results. We are on the right path; it's a big project for Kazakh football. We made the first step; we have to continue along the road.

What are your goals for the team in 2015?

My target next season is to grow the project that I started this year and to continue to work and make professional and strong football with respect for Kazakh traditions.

How were you accepted in Kazakhstan in general beyond football?

I accepted the job in Astana because I think there is a serious possibility of developing Kazakh football. It is a personal challenge to achieve this objective. I feel very accomplished and professional working in FC Astana 1964.

What would you say are your challenges in Kazakhstan?

I think I can help a lot with the development of football in Kazakhstan. (There must be) much trust in my ability and I know that this project was executed successfully. Of course, I have a professional ambition to continue to grow more in the future in Kazakhstan.

Continued on Page B7

Book about Kazakhstan Presented in Italy

By Julia Rutz

A new book, "Kazakhstan, the Centre of Eurasia," was presented during the recent Fair Più Libri Più Liberi (More books, more freedom), one of the major Italian book fairs.

The event was organised by

the Kazakh Embassy in Italy in cooperation with Sandro Teti Editore, which is among the largest publishing houses in the country, and dedicated to the celebrations of the Day of the First President and the 23rd anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence.

Continued on Page B3

THINGS TO WATCH DECEMBER

ASTANA OPERA

December 25, 27, 28, 31 Nutcracker ballet at 19:00

CONGRESS HALL

December 26 at 10:00 New Year Adventures

SARY ARKA CYCLING TRACK

December 27 at 19:00 New Year Party with Stars

KOKTAL FLY ASTANA

December 28 at 12:00 Fly Astana Extreme Jumps

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Assyrian Community in Kazakhstan Survived Dark Times, Now Focuses on Education

Continued from Page B1

"But my ancestors were forced to flee to what is today the territory of Iran because of their religion, as they were orthodox. Then, in 1915, my grandfather and my parents fled Iran to the Russian Empire for the same reason. At the time, Russia gave them shelter. And until 1950, we lived in Tbilisi, Georgia. In 1950, our family was deported to Kazakhstan by a decree of Josef Stalin."

According to Bit-Suleiman, because the Assyrian community is so small and most of them are relatives, Assyrians have to marry outside their own ethnicity.

Without the possibility of visiting their historical homeland, "Assyrians in Kazakhstan made their priority higher education," Bit-Suleiman said. Most Assyrians in Kazakhstan have a higher education today and are successful businessmen and hard-working people, she said.

"Because I was born in Georgia, I never had the burning feeling to visit my historical homeland. I consider Georgia my homeland," Bit-Suleiman explained.

"But we have been living in Kazakhstan for such a long time; we have been accepted well in [these] lands since 1950. We first settled in Shelek (Almaty Oblast). We had our own farm and grew crops, vegetables, fruits, pretty much everything."

Assyrians still live on the territory of Iraq and Syria, but are being persecuted for their religion, she explained. There are over 300,000 Assyrians living in Iraq and 400,000



Nelly Bit-Suleiman

in Syria, the largest populations of Assyrians in the world. More than 100,000 live in Jordan, Sweden and the United States, with the smallest populations in Kazakhstan and Finland: between 300-350 people. The Assyrians across the Soviet Union were deported under Stalin's decree in 1950.

"I remember [the day of deportation clearly]. It was February 14, at 2 a.m. A truck pulled over near our house. I was little and don't remember much and I was sick that night with fever. Four or five men in military uniform came for us. We had only two hours to pick up our things," recalled Bit-Suleiman.

"Then they delivered us to a railway station and forced us all into the cattle cars. It took 17 days to get from Tbilisi to Kazakhstan; 17 days, starting from February 14," she repeated.

Assyrians, as a population, have witnessed the Arab conquest (seventh century), Mongolian and Tur-

anic rule after the fall of Baghdad (13th century), Ottoman rule (16th century) and the hardship of World War I, when about 300,000 Assyrians, some two-thirds of the entire population, were estimated to have been killed by the army of the Ottoman empire.

"When we were delivered to Shelek, at first there was nowhere to live, and the local population came to help by offering their homes," Bit-Suleiman said. But locals couldn't accommodate all of us, there were too many of us, so our family didn't get lucky and we had to live in a sort of a night club, as we didn't have a choice. We had been living there in the dressing rooms for one year. The people from a collective farm helped us with some rice and eggs and meat. We couldn't move anywhere from Shelek as we were watched by the state's authorities; we were on parole. My sister once travelled outside the collective farm and was jailed for five days for violating her parole. After these hard times, our lives slowly became easier and easier and in 1956, we were relieved of parole and could then move to Almaty."

The Assyrian centre in Kazakhstan was established in 1991 in Almaty. The centre participates in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, portraying their cultural values and sharing their moving history with others in Kazakhstan.

The centre also employs Assyrian language teachers and a dancing club, in an effort to retain their identity and pass it on to the next generation, so their long history can continue.

ATOM Project Inspires Participants at Int'l Anti-Nuclear Weapons Conference

Continued from Page B1

Kazakhstan's official delegation, headed by the country's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to International Organisations in Vienna, Kairat Sarybay, included Senator Baktybai Chelpekov, member of the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) Viktor Rogalev and Ambassador-at-Large Barlybai Sadykov. The delegation invited Kuyukov to speak at the conference to the astonishment of many. His address and artworks once again reminded the world of the tragic consequences of nuclear testing.

"Speaking on behalf of all victims of nuclear testing, I want my generation to be the last generation to bear the effects of this monstrous evil," Kuyukov said to the attendees of the conference, drawing enthusiastic applause.

Kuyukov also generated a great deal of interest at the ICAN civil society forum that was held on the eve of the Vienna conference. Kuyukov's personal story and on-going battle against nuclear weapons was enriched at the event by attending Hibakusha (Japanese atomic bombing survivors) and victims of nuclear testing from Utah (affected by nuclear weapons testing in neighbouring state of Nevada) and the Marshall Islands who shared their experiences.

The historic decision to close the nuclear testing site near Semipalatinsk for the sake of the people of independent Kazakhstan as well as global security was underscored at the conference. Around 500 atmospheric, surface and underground nuclear

tests were conducted during the site's 40 years of operations that devastated the local population and countryside. The closing of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site by a historic decree from President Nazarbayev was a substantial contribution to global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, several delegations noted during the conference. They noted that the rejection of nuclear weapons and their subsequent elimination in Kazakhstan serves as a precedent for other countries to follow.

The conference ended with the chairman's summary from Austria which highlighted the urgent need for more robust global efforts to move forward the nuclear disarmament efforts.

"States, international organisations, UN entities, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and civil society representatives recalled their deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons," the summary noted. "They welcomed the convening of the Vienna 3 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. Participants appreciated the testimonials of survivors of nuclear weapons use and testing, including for educating and raising awareness among youth."

"Many delegates expressed concern about the limited progress in nuclear disarmament and stressed the view that humanitarian considerations should no longer be ignored but be at the core of all nuclear disarmament deliberations," the summary concluded. "They welcomed the broad participation, including by

several nuclear weapons possessor states. They also considered that the discussions would contribute to the implementation of the 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan and earlier undertakings and the achievement of a meaningful outcome to the 2015 NPT Review Conference that takes nuclear disarmament efforts forward. Moreover, they reiterated the importance of the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty as a key element of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

"Many delegations considered that the existence and possible use of nuclear weapons and the resulting unacceptable consequences raise profound moral and ethical issues. ... The majority of delegations underscored that the final elimination of nuclear weapons should be pursued within an agreed legal framework, including a nuclear weapons convention," the summary said.

On the sidelines of the conference, member of the Mazhilis, Secretary of the Committee for International Relations and Defense and Security Viktor Rogalev acted as a keynote speaker at the Parliamentarians for a Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) round table discussion hosted by members of the Austrian parliament. The PNND is a non-partisan forum for parliamentarians to share resources and information with colleagues both at home and abroad, as well as to coordinate efforts and directly address nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament issues.

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CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Atyrau Folk Instrument Orchestra Performs in Paris

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

To celebrate the 23rd anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence, the Dina Nurpeisova Academic Orchestra of Folk Instruments from Atyrau held a major concert on Dec. 15 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Parisians got to experience the beauty of some of Kazakhstan's traditional music compositions, the kuis, written by Kurmangazy, Tattimbet, Latif Hamidi and Nurgisa Tlendiyev.

"These are very interesting works. They are not structurally similar to European music. I think the French people will understand. In 1928, our great singer Amre Kashaubayev participated in an exhibition in the USSR for the first time. There he sang several Kazakh songs. These folk songs were also performed at this concert," Chief Conductor of the Academic Orchestra Orak Zhaurov said.

UNESCO included the Kazakh kui on its Intangible Cultural



The concert was warmly received by a traditionally hard to please refined Parisian audience.

Heritage of Humanity List in November. Subsequently, musi-

cians focused on the kuis at this concert.

"This music is very beautiful and was performed very well

here at the event. The Kazakh kui was included on the UNESCO list because it is a living tradition that has never been interrupted. It shows the people's national identity," Perez De Arminan, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Culture, commented.

"For me, this is a discovery. The music is great. I loved all of the performances; it's a fantastic evening! I enjoy this fantastic music," Professor of Paris-Ouest University Augustin Holl said.

For the French people, the performance brought new experiences and unforgettable emotions. The audience did not want to let the artists leave the stage, asking them to play their kuis once more.

Ambassador of Kazakhstan to France Nurlan Danenov said that the ceremony was the final segment of the Season of Culture of Kazakhstan in France. The season was praised by both Presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and François Hollande during Hollande's recent visit to Astana.

Musicians from Kazakhstan also performed in the French town of Fontainebleau on Dec. 14.

Before the concert, Professor, Knight of the Order of the Academic Palms, Laureate of the Peace and Spiritual Consent Award of Kazakhstan Albert Fischler, who also delivered a series of lectures on the culture and literature of Central Asia and Kazakhstan at the Al Farabi Kazakh National University, addressed his countrymen and spoke about Kazakhstan and its traditional songs.

Fontainebleau Mayor Frederick Wallet noted the importance of inter-regional cooperation in all fields, particularly in culture. According to him, residents of Fontainebleau praised the artist's performances.

This was the second time this year that the Atyrau orchestra went on a European tour. Last spring, the artists gave Nauryz performances in Turkey, Germany and Austria.

Zhusan Ballet Premieres at Astana Opera

By Malika Rustem

ASTANA – "Zhusan," a one-act ballet telling a story of the Great Steppe, premiered Dec. 10 and 11 on the stage of the Astana Opera. The performance highlighted the attention to creations of Kazakh authors in the troupe's repertoire.

The offering, which recounts the formation of the Kazakh people's identity, was warmly welcomed by local audiences and generated much emotion and applause from the city's art-loving scene.

"Zhusan" (Kazakh for worm-

wood, a plant inherent to the steppes) was created in the genre of "plotless ballet," which directors note does not mean the absence of content. According to young choreographer Mukaram Avahri, she was guided by strong feelings and emotions while creating the dance movements.

"This performance is ambiguous. We see young women and the bride and all of a sudden the picture is swept by the Samum steppe wind and filled with sand. Then suddenly we see a picture from past times. And everything is conveyed through the monologue, the

story of sagebrush, steppe grass – Zhusan. For me, Zhusan first of all implies an emotional state. The performance in general conveys the mood, the state. An emotional state was important for me," said Avahri.

The work of the choreographer is divided into nine scenes: The Bride, Samum (Sandstorm), Wormwood, Centaurs, A Gift from Heaven, Hunting, Massive Loss of Cattle, Awakening and Invasion. The main idea of the ballet is based on the legends and myths of the steppe people; their allegorical image is embodied in the dance.

The central theme of the play is the steppe's memory awakening with distant and recent events. A short but very meaningful description by the author says that past and present, war and peace, inland and outland, serene and alarm, captivity and freedom, passion and tenderness are elements of the content.

"Nameless herbs' memory will not tell all these to you, but it 'remembers' their tragic images. Happiness is never long, but it is like the sun – bright and vital. Special colour and mysticism is given to the play by a combination of choreography and extracts from great European, Russian and national music, as well as lighting design with video projections overlay. All these help the audience immerse in the atmosphere of a real journey through the vast steppes, legends and myths," the description reads.

Outstanding local and Russian dancers, including Alila Alishева, Aigul Tati, Nikolai Markelov and tutor Zaure Umbetkulova, participated in the staging of the ballet.

The music also came from various prominent composers, such as Kuat Shildebayev, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Arvo Pärt and Karl Jenkins. Shildebayev's melodies create the musical core of the ballet.

Costume designer Olga Shaishmelashvili, a director and designer from St. Petersburg, was able to combine the experience of the past with original, modern findings.

Astana Ballet dancers have been well received domestically and internationally. "Alem," their first performance, was a notable success both on the Kazakh stage and during the world tour in Vienna, Paris and Seoul.



The Zhusan ballet premiere in Astana presented an unusual way of staging performances, one that seemingly does not have a plot.

Kazakh Scholars Take Part in Migration Conference in Spain

By Zhanara Abdulova

The history of European migration and settlement was in the limelight at the international conference, "The Great Migrations: The Colonisation of Europe," held at the initiative of Kazakh scholars in Spain's University of Granada on Dec. 11.

The event, organised by Kazakhstan's Embassy in Madrid in cooperation with the University of Granada and under the auspices of UNESCO, brought together leading experts and scientists in the fields of migration, palaeontology and archaeology. Among the scholars were representatives of Cambridge University, the University of Bologna, the Sorbonne, the Max Planck Institute and the Russian Academy of Science. Kazakh Ambassador to Spain Bakyt Dyussenbayev, President of the Culture Foundation Olzhas Suleimenov, Director of the Almaty-based Institute of Oriental Studies Absattar Derbisali and Director of UNESCO's office in Russia Dende Badarch were also in attendance.

"The organisation of this conference is our contribution to rapprochement among cultures," Dyussenbayev was quoted as saying by Spanish news agency EFE during a visit to the Alhambra with the other conference participants. Suleimenov, a renowned Kazakh poet, scientist and diplomat, said the reports made at the conference as well as the animated discussions among participants greatly contributed to forging a common understanding of the way people migrated and settled down in ancient times and provided insight into the origins of various ethnic groups.

"This conference promoted mutual understanding and knowledge of cultural and ethnic diversity, demonstrating that it might become one of the tools for intercultural dialogue. It confirmed that the study of migrations in the early history of mankind provides a framework for commonly shared values and promotes dialogue for sustainable development in its cultural, social and ethnic aspects. The study of such issues leads to raising global consciousness through the rapprochement of cultures," Suleimenov said.

Participants called the conference a response by the intellectual community to UNESCO's call for a "new policy and the involvement of new parties" in the process of rapprochement between peoples.

The government of Kazakhstan initiated the event as part of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures. The decade, 2013-2022, is a UNESCO initiative that grew out of the 2010 Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures proclaimed by the United Nations at the urging of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

One of the major purposes of the conference was to examine the processes of settlement in Europe, to study the geographical origins of tribes and peoples who came to the continent during its initial development and to come to a better understanding of major migration trends. Consideration of these processes will contribute to the creation of a common pattern of human settlement across the globe. The conference also provided an opportunity to learn more about the universal history of mankind, bringing together different schools of thought, research groups and institutions.

Following the event, the participants adopted a declaration expressing their hope that the scientific community as well as international organisations across the world will pay greater attention to the project, which provides a comprehensive study of human settlement on the planet as an important means of deepening interethnic dialogue and rapprochement of cultures in the interests of peace and sustainable development for all nations.

The conclusions reached in Granada were incorporated with the findings of previous meetings, including the 2011 Conference on the Colonisation of the Americas prior to Columbus held at New York's Colombia University and the 2013 discussion of population movements in Southeast Asia and the Far East hosted by Hangan University in Seoul.

Founded in 1531 by Emperor Charles V, the University of Granada has almost 500 years of history and is one of the most famous universities in Spain.

Book about Kazakhstan Presented in Italy

Continued from Page B1

The author, Fabio Indeo, is an Italian analyst and expert in geopolitics. The foreword was written by Aldo Ferrari, a professor of history and culture at Venice Ca' Foscari University whose name is well known and well respected among scientists and experts on Italy. The book was published in Italian.

"Kazakhstan's model of political and economic development, as well as secrets of its effectiveness, have always been attracting the interest of foreign researchers. Among numerous publications on this topic, the Italian vision of Kazakhstan is worth reading. In fact, this book presents key events of the modern history of Kazakhstan. In a lively and accessible manner, the author talks about different aspects of life in modern Kazakhstan: politics and business, diplo-

macy and education, history and culture," said Kazakh Ambassador to Italy Andrian Yelemessov.

He also noted that political, cultural and scientific communities, as well as the Italian public in general, now have a good opportunity to learn about the present and the past of his nation. The book will help readers comprehend the current trends and development of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and its newly-emerged international initiatives in a more profound way.

Indeo emphasised that Kazakhstan currently plays a crucial role in the economic, political and energy spheres of the former Soviet Union area and Central Asia. He also added that he tried to highlight the meaning of the close cooperation between Kazakhstan and Italy.

The presentation was attended by public figures, scientists, experts, professors and students from

the University of Rome, as well as Italian media representatives and major book publishers. Overall, the event participants were unanimous

in their opinion that this book will further help in the rapprochement and building better understanding between the two countries.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

President Visits South Kazakhstan, Reviews Region's Economic and Energy Development



President Nursultan Nazarbayev (c) inspected proposed projects for Shymkent and its environs on a visit to the city on Dec. 4.

By Danna Bupezhanova

President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited on Dec. 4 South Kazakhstan and its capital Shymkent, which is Kazakhstan's third most populous city and is expected to become a national economic and cultural centre.

"Along with the capital we need to develop other cities of the country. It is big cities where we can develop science, technology and culture. Therefore, Shymkent should become a centre where innovation and industry experts would live, a city of high culture. We've put in a lot of efforts to achieve these results. In five years, the economy of the South Kazakhstan region has doubled. More than 300 schools and 280 new health facilities have been built," said Nazarbayev, underlining the need to develop large megacities to enhance Kazakhstan's competitiveness in the international arena.

Initially built as a minor Silk Road stop, Shymkent today is a thriving trade centre that produces cement, cigarettes, phosphates and refines oil. It is a significant cultural centre as well as an important transport hub and major railroad junction on the Turkestan-Siberia Railway situated near the border with Uzbekistan.

President Nazarbayev stressed during his visit the transit im-

portance of the South Kazakhstan region, one of the most densely populated and fastest growing regions in the country. He highlighted a number of infrastructure projects, including the Western Europe - Western China international transit corridor, which seeks to shorten delivery times from China to Europe from 45 days to 14 days and advance Kazakhstan's transit potential.

He also noted the Beineu-Bozoi-Shymkent gas pipeline, the largest pipeline project in the history of independent Kazakhstan. Similar projects in the framework of the new Nurlu Zhol economic policy will give new impetus to the socio-economic development of the region and the country in general, Nazarbayev said during the visit. He also underlined Kazakhstan's cooperation with neighbouring states, focusing on the opening of the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway, which allows Kazakhstan to export products to Gulf countries and provides access to the markets of India and other South Asian countries.

Examining the socio-economic development of the region, the head of state visited construction sites for the new Tau administrative and business centre, consisting of 12 facilities of cultural, so-

cial, economic, commercial and administrative purpose. He also visited the new Turkestan palace of celebrations, Rixos Khadisha Shymkent Hotel and Shanin Regional Kazakh Theatre.

President Nazarbayev emphasised that to progress as a country Kazakhstan should pay equal attention to developing the economy as well as the arts and culture, including the promotion of spiritual and moral values and patriotism.

Shymkent has also been developing its tourism sector and construction has begun on a historical and cultural area, which will include Nauruz Square and the Museum of Local Lore and Customs and Rituals.

The region has also become a part of the country's efforts to implement alternative energy projects in accordance with Kazakhstan's industrial and innovation policy and the country's effort to transition to more efficient energy resources. The region is ready to initiate 21 new projects, including the second Water Resources Marketing project to introduce renewable energy sources as part of the country's green economy programme. These projects will allow the region to reduce its dependency on supplies from other regions.

ISTC to be Headquartered at Nazarbayev University in 2015

By Michelle Witte

GAITHERSBURG, MD – The International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC), a multigovernment nonproliferation programme established in 1992, is moving its headquarters from Moscow to Astana's Nazarbayev University in 2015, at the invitation of the Kazakh government.

The organisation is mainly funded by the United States, Canada, the EU, Japan, Norway and South Korea, as well as some corporate partners, and funds projects in Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. It was established to provide weapons scientists from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), particularly those with experience with weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, a chance at employment and incomes through peaceful activities, as well as to help those scientists integrate into the international scientific community, according to the organisation's website. The organisation also supports the transition of former Soviet countries to market-based economies and contributes generally to global scientific research.

Headquartered in Moscow since 1994, the Russian government declared their intention to leave the organisation in 2010, and the Moscow office is expected to close in early 2015. No reason was officially given for the withdrawal at the time, but then-director of the ISTC Adriaan van der Meer said in a 2011 interview that clearly, Russian officials considered the organisation's mission in Russia to be finished.

Kazakhstan expressed its willingness to host the ISTC when it heard Russia was withdrawing from the organisation, David Cleave, executive director of the ISTC, told The Astana Times on Nov. 28. "Kazakhstan was chosen on the basis that ISTC has had a large number of projects in Kazakhstan, over other regions, and we see that this may well be continued in future."

The organisation has funded more than 2,700 proposals since its establishment, giving grants

to more than 75,000 scientists in Russia and the CIS. There are currently 10 active projects in Kazakhstan in five locations around the country. The centre is expected to open with at least 20 staff members, a number which might increase depending on funding and projects.

The original choice for the new headquarters was Almaty, Cleave said, but it was decided it would be better to be closer to embassies and Kazakh governmental bodies in the capital. The decision to set up shop at Nazarbayev University was made in cooperation with Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education and Science.

"It was through Ministry of Education and Science that they suggested we be housed in the Nazarbayev University campus, as the university itself is very much at the forefront of developing the future of science, technology and innovation in the future, something which [President of Kazakhstan] Nursultan Nazarbayev feels strongly about in developing Kazakhstan going forward," Cleave said.

Nazarbayev University will serve as the ISTC's organisational base, from which it will administer its projects in Kazakhstan and the region, including coordinating financing, procurement, funding, monitoring and auditing. The main work of the ISTC at Nazarbayev University will be to continue to fund projects and arrange scientific seminars and workshops in science and technology and research and development, Cleave said.

The impact on the university will not be huge, he said, as the organisation will simply continue to support specific projects within its network of countries from its new administrative headquarters. However, the university could benefit from the organisation's presence there as a facilitator of contacts and collaborators for research and funding.

"If Kazakhstan continues to build its internal industrial capacity, Nazarbayev University could become a regional educational [or] research hub for Central Asia, which would allow the ISTC to tap into the regional educational system for up-and-coming new scientists," Cleave said. As the

university is still quite young, this must remain only a possibility for some time, the executive director cautioned.

The nature of Nazarbayev University may also contribute to some distance from the rest of the country's scientific and educational system. "This system is not fully linked to the existing research and educational establishment in Kazakhstan, but rather is currently an independent initiative overseen and funded directed through the presidential administration," Cleave noted. "To a certain degree, the research arm of Nazarbayev University might be considered to be in competition with established scientific research institutes in Kazakhstan."

As for university students, again, the possibilities are all in the early stages of exploration. "There could be a role for the ISTC in expediting and facilitating exchanges for Nazarbayev University, in particular in the research arm of Nazarbayev University," Cleave said. There is also the possibility of ISTC fellowships for specific activities, which would give local students exposure to work in an international organisation, while also helping the ISTC organise and plan local and regional events.

Cleave noted Kazakhstan's efforts to develop and diversify its economy and its scientific and research capacity away from its primary strengths: resource extraction and, to some degree, processing. "Engineering needs will be prominent if the government [continues] to fund diversification of its economy, as well as developing the technical capabilities of the population to support widened industrial activity," he commented.

The country is making progress in developing its scientific base, Cleave said. The most promising areas of scientific development in Kazakhstan include developing industries that provide higher value-added resources into the global supply chain, supporting public and private space launch initiatives and continuing to assist with the long term storage of hazardous and volatile materials, he said, as well as the energy and alternative energy industries currently receiving massive investment in the run up to EXPO 2017.

New High School Opens to Ease Overcrowding in Aktobe Region

By Zhubanysh Baigurinov

A new high school opened on Dec. 9 in the 12th district of Aktobe is expected to address three-shift education in the region and allow students from overcrowded classes in schools number 43 and 51 to move to the new school.

Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan Aslan Sarinzhipov and regional Akim (Governor) Arkhimed Mukhambetov attended the opening.

Sarinzhipov said the region has been working to implement the directive of Kazakh President Nur-

sultan Nazarbayev to address the problem of schools in poor conditions and three-shift education and that 10 schools will be built in the next three years in Aktobe. This will eliminate the problem of emergency-condition schools and three-shift education in the region. The three-shift education refers to the situation when, because of overcrowding, students have to attend school not in two, but in three shifts, a practice considered abnormal and unhealthy.

Sarinzhipov also noted that the national government will pay for the construction of 20 kindergar-

tens in the region over the next three years.

The new school in the 12th district is designed for 600 students and includes large classrooms for biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, technology and language studies. It also includes a greenhouse, biological and geographic research facilities, sports and physical training facilities, as well as a large library with a reading room, events hall and dining room. The school cost 785 million tenge (US \$4.3 million) to build and was paid for out of the national budget.

Kazakhstan to Start Large Road Projects in 2015

By Yelden Sarybay

ASTANA – The government of Kazakhstan will allocate 178 billion tenge (US\$977.75 million) in 2015 and a further 143.3 billion tenge (US\$787.14 million) in 2016 from the country's National Fund for road improvements, according to a Kazinform report dated Dec. 4. The funds will be used to improve major routes, including Centre-South (Astana-Karaganda-

Balkhash-Almaty), Centre-East (Astana-Pavlodar-Aktau), and Centre-West (Astana-Arkalyk-Torgai-Shalkar-Beineu-Aktau).

Road and infrastructure improvements are a major component of the country's new Nurlu Zhol economic policy. President Nursultan Nazarbayev said in his Nov. 11 state-of-the-nation address titled, "Nurlu Zhol – Path to the Future," that developing transport and logistics infrastructure will improve the nation's economy,

facilitate entrepreneurialism and strengthen inter-regional cooperation.

International organisations, such as the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) are expected to provide approximately 760 billion tenge (US\$4.2 billion) until 2020 for the road improvements.

The projects are expected to create 200,000 jobs until 2020, according to government estimations.

Furthermore, 2015 will see an allocation of 6.7 billion tenge (US\$36.8 million) for the Borzhakty-Ersai railway project and 4.8 billion tenge (US\$26.36 million) for the construction of a ferry complex in the Kuryk port of the Mangistau region.

The Western Europe-Western China road corridor is expected to be launched in 2015 while the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway was completed and launched earlier in December. The new railway is expected to increase the transit of goods between the countries to 40 million tonnes annually.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Kazakh Government, Civil Society Discuss New Bill on NGOs

By Zhanar Abdulova

ASTANA – Recognising the need to help build a more efficient and sustainable civil society in Kazakhstan, members of the Kazakh Parliament, representatives of various government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations gathered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dec. 18 to discuss a draft bill which would introduce innovations regarding public funding of NGOs.

The bill, proposed by the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, is set to introduce long-discussed public grants and awards for funding of NGOs. It prompted a lively discussion by the Dialogue Platform on Human Dimension, a foreign ministry-initiated Consultative and Advisory Body initiated in 2013.

Deputies of the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament), members of the Commission for Human Rights under the President of Kazakhstan, the National Centre for Human Rights, Constitutional Council, General Prosecutor's Office, officials from the ministries of justice, health and social development, culture and sports, as well as almost 40 representatives of NGOs, took part in the meeting.

The agenda included three key items and was aimed at strengthening the dialogue between the authorities and civil society organisations on human dimension issues and promoting civil society initiatives and its increased participation in the NGO legislative process, as well as continuing the discussion on fulfillment of recommendations given to Kazakhstan under the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Seeking common ground during the three-hour discussion, attendees holding diametrically-opposing views shared their opinions on a wide range of topics relating to the mechanisms and rules of NGO funding. Many details were hotly debated, including usage of the term "non-governmental organisation," a phrase that is commonly used but not specified in Kazakh legislation. Legal experts insisted the term should be substituted with "non-commercial organisation" as stipulated in the Civil Code, while members of NGOs maintained the new bill should provide the definition of the widely-used expression.

The majority of civil society representatives agreed with public authorities that the time is ripe for the adoption of the law and expressed their desire to further participate in

the working group activity before submitting the draft bill to parliament. Unveiled by the government in early 2013, the long-awaited bill is currently in the final stages of public consultation and is expected to be submitted to parliament at the beginning of next year.

The suggested amendments to NGO legislation are aimed at enhancing their role and capacity in Kazakhstan and strengthening the part of the "third sector" in the provision of public services. The amendments propose introducing grant financing, which will provide NGOs with greater resources to professionalise and elevate their work to international standards.

The draft law introduces the well-established international practice of grant financing, which will allow Kazakhstan's non-governmental sector to progress to a new level of development.

The bill also suggests consolidating and simplifying the procedure of grant distribution by creating a special body or operator, in the form of a noncommercial association. The body aims to bring greater organisation and efficiency to the process of distributing public funds, mediating between state agencies and their suppliers from the NGO community and bringing

greater transparency to the NGO-state procurement process as a whole. Moreover, the body will be able to provide independent monitoring and supervision of the implementation of joint NGO-state projects, allowing more effective management and use of funds.

The bill also proposes that foreign donors will also have the opportunity to provide funds to the operator to organise grant financing of Kazakh NGOs, opening a new level of cooperation between international donors and the NGO sector.

Addressing the meeting participants, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP resident representative in Kazakhstan Stephen Tull praised the nation's efforts in achieving the major purpose of the UPR, which is to improve the human rights situation in the country.

"Kazakhstan has made significant progress in this area, one of the major achievements of which is the introduction of the national preventive mechanism [against torture] and facilitating effective implementation of the UN Universal Periodic Review recommendations," Tull said. "Over the recent years we have seen noticeable increase in the number of NGOs in the country."

Tull highlighted the increased

dialogue between civil society and government on human rights issues, noting that broad consultations with an equal involvement of the government, civil society and international organisations allow Kazakhstan to take a significant step forward in this direction and encourage robust and participatory dialogue.

Deputy Justice Minister Elvira Azimova presented the major results of Kazakhstan's second national report prepared within the UPR of Human Rights. She spoke about work done in the framework of the project aimed at further improvement of human rights mechanisms in the country and effective implementation of UPR recommendations.

Azimova emphasised Kazakhstan's successful and effective cooperation with the UN agencies, noting that the report was prepared with participation of civil society, the OSCE, European Union and in close interaction with UN agencies, primarily the United Nations Development Programme.

"There are three types of recommendations: the ones that were accepted and fully implemented, recommendations that were rejected and finally recommendations that were accepted and will be ad-

ressed in future work," she noted. "We had to reject some of the recommendations taking into account their relevance [to the processes in the country]."

Chairman of Kazakhstan's International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law Yevgeny Zhovtis summarised the comments and suggestions of civil society to implement the recommendations of the second cycle of the UPR.

During the meeting, a package of UN recommendations aimed at further bringing Kazakhstan's legislation in line with international standards for the protection of human rights and freedoms were presented.

Following the work of the Consultative Advisory Body last year and this year, more than 150 recommendations were developed, of which about 40 were approved by representatives of state bodies and will be implemented in the future, while 60 recommendations remain under discussion with the remainder considered debatable.

Recommendations made by members of civil society during the meeting were adopted by representatives of public authorities in order to further develop democracy and civil liberties, as well as the rule of law in Kazakhstan.

Kazakh Language Now Part of Google Translate Services

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – The Kazakh language is now among the offerings of the Google Translate online global translating system, founder and director of the WikiBilim Public Foundation Rauan Kenzhekhanuly announced on Dec. 12.

Kazakh joins the 90 other languages available through the translation system, which is accessible on computers and mobile devices. WikiBilim is a nonprofit organisation operating in Kazakhstan that develops and promotes online educational content in the Kazakh language.

"One and a half year ago, we started to think how to include the Kazakh language in Google Translate. We addressed this question to the Google Company and were told that it would be necessary to provide the system with a large number of mirror translations from Kazakh into English and back. This would give the translating system an opportunity to seize the algorithm of Kazakh and after a while be able to build its initial translation options," Kenzhekhanuly said.

The WikiBilim team started off translating Wikipedia into Kazakh, according to Kenzhekhanuly.

"The Kazakh Wikipedia only had 7,000 articles and four people working on the translations before we actively started to translate content into Kazakh. Our task was to assemble a team or a community that would undertake the task to translate and edit articles into Kazakh. Today, we have some 210,000 articles, and 350 people are constantly working on the pro-

ject. By translating Wikipedia, we created a database and algorithms that allowed us to transcribe the alphabets properly," he said as he explained the process during a Dec. 15 briefing at the Central Communications Service.

In the middle of October, Kenzhekhanuly announced a test mode of translating Kazakh into English and back. However, the system could not manage translations of long texts and was more convenient for translating words and phrases.

Currently, translations are available to and from English; later, Kenzhekhanuly promised, the system will slowly adopt Russian-Kazakh translations as well. He urged all Kazakh and English speakers to help their team improve the translation by contributing corrections to the system.

To correct mistakes in translation, developers suggest clicking the pencil icon and making needed corrections, then saving those changes by clicking "Improve translation."

"We are very grateful to the people of Kazakhstan for their contribution to the Google Translate Community and invite everyone to continue the work on improvement of online translation in the future," Google's press service reported.

The Google translator is free and available to all users. According to recent data, more than 200 million users are using it daily.

Because Turkish and Azerbaijani, Turkic languages like Kazakh, were also among the 90 languages offered by Google Translate, the nature of the Kazakh language was already familiar to the system.

"Google Translate is a world where the most active languages exist. Being part of such a big process gives us a lot in terms of technology and the development of the language itself. The system is improving all the time and provides additional possibilities. Today, it is possible to simply tell a story and get a translation," said Kenzhekhanuly.

Volunteer and project coordinator of the Google Translate Community service Marat Shaken said that the project currently involves about 300 active volunteers. All of them make changes on a daily basis. Many of them can make up to 300 amendments to the service per day. The translations are not yet perfect, so their work will not stop, he said.

"I will continue to teach courses and coordinate the work of project volunteers. At the beginning, volunteers needed to know two languages: Kazakh and English. However, soon, people with knowledge of Kazakh and Russian will be able to become volunteers. In my view, this will make our work easier and the quality of translation better," Shaken said.

Shaken said that the team had not faced any particular challenges in their work, but that it was difficult to ask people to do the translation work for free. They did not fully understand sometimes why it was necessary and how they would personally benefit from it. "Nevertheless, volunteers joined us and made their contribution. I would like to thank all the people who have been around during the realisation of this idea," Shaken concluded.

Self-Service Touchscreen 'Infokiosks' to be Installed throughout Kazakhstan in 2015

By Julia Rutz

The company Digital City Showcases recently announced the launch of its new Urban Infokiosk project, which will install self-service, touchscreen information terminals in shop windows that will provide information about cultural and commercial events.

The self-service kiosks, which

will be built to withstand local climate conditions, will provide information in Kazakh, Russian and English. The information will include a city map, upcoming events, news, historical notes, exchange rates, weather forecasts and public transport schedules. The terminals will also offer links to public services and the ability to search for local business locations. The

kiosks are expected to be located near public transportation stations.

The project will also be expanded to Dauys Press newsstands. An advanced European infokiosk model with integrated self-service features will be set up in different cities in Kazakhstan next year 2015. This will complete the transition of press sales and their delivery into digital format.

President Calls on Youth to 'Do Science'

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev highlighted the importance of government backing for innovative research Dec. 8 when he attended a conference on the issue in the Tech-Garden Innovational Cluster and visited an exhibition of high-tech research projects at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty.

The President noted that he had instructed the government to strengthen work in this direction in his Nov. 11 address to the people.

"Innovation should lead to a sharp increase in productivity and efficiency. The state encourages the growth of innovation. Over the past five years, the support of this sector has tripled and reached 50 billion tenge (US\$276.2 million). Perhaps in absolute terms it is not so much, but the growth dynamic is there. Gross expenses of research and development increased from 49 to 74 billion tenge (US\$270.6-\$408.7 million), of which 30 billion tenge (US\$165.7 million) is financed at the expense of the private sector. It is a good indicator," said Nazarbayev. He added that according to international statistics in terms of patents issued on innovative projects, Kazakhstan occupies 42nd place out of 140 countries of the world.

The head of state stressed that preparation of innovators begins as early as secondary or even primary school. He underlined it is to this end that a network of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools was launched across the nation with contest-based enrollment for the most-talented children. "The scientists who went abroad (before) are now returning, because we are creating appropriate conditions for their work. This is the forerun-

ner for innovation development," he added.

Nazarbayev noted that innovation means quality and competitiveness of Kazakhstan's products, an important issue for the nation as a member state of the Customs Union and future member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Among other speakers at the conference, Minister for Investment and Development Asset Issekeshiev reported on the situation in the field of innovative development. In his words, the share of innovative activity has nearly doubled compared to 2009 and at the end of 2014 should amount to 10 percent. Plans show an increase in this figure up to 20 percent by 2020, while the share of innovative products in the GDP will increase to 2.5 percent. Over 3,500 projects have been reviewed lately, out of which 577 were approved and received full or partial government funding.

Minister of Education and Science Aslan Sarinzhapov announced that the nation's long-term development strategy stipulates that the government's spending on research and development must reach a level equaling 3 percent of the GDP by 2050.

Prior to the meeting, Nazarbayev visited the exhibition of innovative projects organised on the basis of the university science library, where the participants became acquainted with the achievements and development plan of the institution. At the meeting devoted to innovation cluster development, he was briefed on the implementation of projects aimed at the creation of biomedical and innovation clusters in the city.

The first step on the way to a biomedical cluster was the opening of a diagnostic medical centre with South Korean partners. The

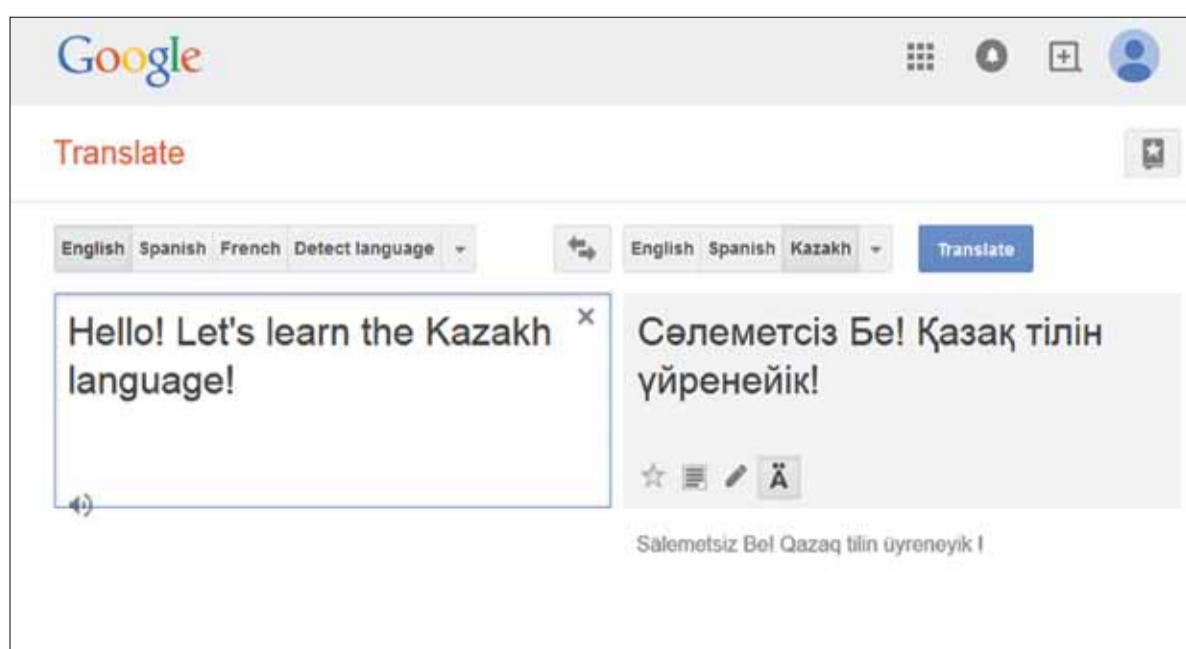
2,400-square metre facility is in the university Keremet Centre of Service for Students, where all teachers and students can receive high-standard medical services with modern high-tech equipment. The total investment in the centre was 1.2 billion tenge (US\$6.6 million).

The establishment of the biomedical cluster is aimed at enhancing development of the scientific and human resources potential of the country, expansion of international cooperation and transfer of innovative medical technologies, as well as integration of research and education activities.

The engineering and high-technologies innovation cluster is another of the university's large-scale projects. Approximately 9.5 billion tenge (\$52.5 million) will be invested in the construction of a technology park, business incubator, industrial center, laboratory buildings for a research institute and comfortable dormitory for 1,500 for students and young scientists.

The purpose of the project is creation of modern infrastructure for scientific research, the transfer of high technology, commercialisation of scientific innovation and integration of science, education and innovative production at the transnational level.

This project will increase the volume of scientific research and development and help create a cluster based on high-tech start-up companies and enterprises, as well as attract international investment in science. Perhaps the key statement that the President made on the day was, "Once again I appeal to our young people – do science." There is a hope that the meeting will help improve conditions created for youth willing to implement their dreams in line with this appeal.



NATION&CAPITAL

TOURISM

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Italy, Vatican Express Interest in Participating in EXPO 2017

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

Italian government and business leaders expressed interest in EXPO 2017 during a Dec. 9-10 visit to Rome by Kazakh First Deputy Foreign Minister Rapol Zhoshybayev.

During the visit, Zhoshybayev, who also serves as the national commissioner for EXPO 2017, met with Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Lapo Pistelli and noted the continuing development of mutual economic and trade cooperation despite negative trends in the global economy. The parties discussed experiences involving preparations for hosting major international events, the Italian companies partaking in EXPO 2017 and companies from Kazakhstan in the upcoming EXPO 2015 in Milan. Zhoshybayev presented Pistelli an official invitation letter to the Italian government to the 2017 exhibition from President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Pistelli noted that Kazakhstan is a key Central Asian partner of Italy's and expressed his support for Kazakhstan's international initiatives.

Also, the commissioner met with Italian Minister of Culture and Tourism Dario Franceschini to brief him on ongoing efforts to develop tourism in Kazakhstan.



Kazakhstan's national commissioner for EXPO 2017 Rapol Zhoshybayev (l) met with Secretary of State, Cardinal of the Catholic Church Pietro Parolin, on Dec. 10, who expressed Vatican's interest in showcasing some of the rare exhibits during the event, including an exposition of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Codex Atlanticus* as part of it.

The two parties discussed potential joint tourism projects, the prospect of opening direct flights between the two countries, as well as promoting Kazakhstan's

tourism potential in Italy. Following the meeting, it was agreed to sign a contract on cooperation between the state owned national company Astana EXPO 2017 and

the Italian Association of Tourism during the meeting of the intergovernmental commission in January 2015.

While visiting Vatican City,

Zhoshybayev held a meeting with Secretary of State, Cardinal of the Catholic Church Pietro Parolin. Kazakhstan's deputy foreign minister noted the high level of understanding and trust between Kazakhstan and the Vatican. He invited the cardinal to attend EXPO 2017 and handed a letter of invitation on behalf of President Nazarbayev to His Holiness Pope Francis.

Parolin expressed interest in taking part in the international exhibition in Astana and offered to organise an exposition of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Codex Atlanticus* as part of it.

The *Codex Atlanticus* is 1,119 pages and was donated in 1637 to the Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Italy, which was founded by Cardinal Federico Borromeo in 1609 as one of the first public libraries in the world. Leonardo's entire life as an artist and scientist appears in the extraordinary collection, which covers a time frame stretching from 1478, when Leonardo was still working in his native Tuscany, to 1519, when he died in France. The folios deal with various subjects ranging from mechanics to hydraulics, studies and sketches for paintings, mathematical and astronomical calculations, philosophical mus-

ings and fables and plans for inventions, such as parachutes, war machines and hydraulic pumps. Currently in Italy, the sheets are displayed in different themes and have rotated every three months since 2009. The full exhibition will run up to Milan's international EXPO 2015.

The cardinal also noted that the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana has become a unique and authoritative platform for dialogue between civilisations and religions.

The internationally recognised congress has become a true trademark of Kazakhstan and evidence of the country's and its first President's efforts to promote peace, harmony, humanism, tolerance and the coexistence of religions. Kazakhstan has specifically built a Palace of Peace and Harmony, where leaders from different parts of the world gather for interreligious dialogue every three years. This building has become a popular destination for tourists visiting Astana and something city residents are truly proud of.

Parolin assured that the Vatican will be appropriately represented in the upcoming fifth congress in Astana, which will be held on June 10-11, 2015.

Almaty Offers World-Class Ski Slopes and Training Facilities

By Julia Rutz

Skiing is a sport that is popular around the globe and Almaty is quickly becoming known for its world-class skiing facilities. This city ringed by snowcapped peaks offers natural slopes and man-made training facilities.

Among Almaty's training facilities is a ski simulator known as Masterski club, which simulates the sensation of downhill skiing.

"This type of facility was first

built in the Netherlands and is very useful in the development of skiing techniques; taking into account all of its advantages, we have decided to build a like facility in our city," said co-founder and director of the club Oleg Chumakov. Ten to 15 classes on the simulator are recommended for beginners and the simulator is also used by experienced skiers to hone their techniques.

Among the city's world-class resorts is the Shymbulak Ski Re-

sort. Day passes for the resort cost 7,000 tenge (US\$38.13) on weekends and 5,500 tenge (US\$29.96) during the week, according to the resort's website. For children up to 10 years of age, students and pensioners, the price is reduced to 3,000 tenge (US\$16.34) on weekdays. Special group classes lasting 2.5 hours cost 8,000 tenge (US\$43.57) for adults and 7,000 tenge (US\$38.13) for children.

Ak-Bulak is another popular ski resort. Day passes cost 7,000 tenge (US\$38.13) on weekends and half that during the week, according to the resort's website. Equipment can be rented in special shops. The rental price for one set of equipment (without ski goggles or a helmet) starts at 3,000 tenge (US\$16.34).

Here is a list of essential ski equipment and its approximate prices locally:

1. Skis: local purchase prices start at 25,000 tenge (US\$136.18).
2. Ski bindings, which attach ski boots to skis: local prices start at 15,000 tenge (US\$81.71). Different types of bindings are offered for various types of skiing, such as Alpine or cross-country.
3. Ski boots: local prices start at 18,000 tenge (US\$98.00).
4. Ski poles: local prices start at 5,000 tenge (US\$27.23).
5. Helmet: local prices start at 10,000 tenge (US\$54.47).
6. Ski goggles: local prices start at 5,000 tenge (US\$27.23).
7. Waterproof Ski clothing: local prices start at 10,000 tenge (US\$54.47).



New Rixos Hotel Opens in Shymkent, Raises Local Service to New Levels

By Nurzhan Arystanov

SHYMKENT – Rixos Khadisha Shymkent, the first ever five star hotel in South Kazakhstan, opened with great fanfare on Dec. 20.

The grand opening of the hotel saw about 400 guests, including representatives of the Akimats (local governments) of Shymkent city and South Kazakhstan region, guests from Astana and Almaty, representatives of business and culture. The event included a gala dinner featuring performances by foreign artists and a festive entertainment programme.

Located in the heart of the city, the new 34,000-square-metre hotel, Rixos Khadisha Shymkent offers 177 rooms, decorated in a modern style in six different categories: superior, suite, family suite, luxury suite, royal and presidential suite. According to the hotel, its Presidential Suite spread out over 450 square metres is the biggest suite not only in Shymkent, but throughout Kazakhstan. The hotel also boasts meeting rooms of different sizes for groups from 15 to 100 people and a ballroom with a capacity of up to 700 guests.

Rixos Khadisha Shymkent also features two restaurants where patrons can enjoy dishes from around the world. The Italian restaurant

Olivia offers fine cuisine from Italian chef and Kazakhasia restaurant offers dishes of national cuisines of Central and South-East Asia. Khadisha patisserie aims to delight guests with delicate desserts, sweets and homemade cakes.

The White Horse Bar and Atrium Café are to offer a wide range of non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages.

The hotel has a Spa with fitness room, swimming pool, hammam, sauna and a snow room. It also has a beauty salon equipped with the most modern equipment. The Spa also offers a vitamin bar and massage rooms.

Rixos Khadisha Shymkent is the fourth hotel of the Rixos hotel chain in Kazakhstan, the other three being located in Astana, Almaty and Schuchinsk in the Burabay resort area.

Its construction began in early 2013. The so called green technologies were used in building it up, with the aim of minimising the impact on the environment and reducing energy consumption.

According to the hotel, the appearance of such a facility in Shymkent has a very important social and cultural value to the city, including in areas such as job creation, training employees

in international standards of hospitality and Rixos five-star hotel standards, opening of new places for leisure such as restaurants, bars, hotels, spa, as well as the appearance of new conference and banquet facilities. The hotel also participates in the so-called Road Map programme of dual education together with the Akimat of the Shymkent city.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Rixos Hotels Fethah Tamince visited the hotel before the opening and noted that implementation of the project was very quick and on the high level.

"Hotel Rixos Khadisha Shymkent today is unmatched in the elite and comfort. Thomas Noll, General Manager of the hotel, invites all to enjoy the highest hospitality level and widest range of services," he said, according to a hotel press release.

The Rixos Hotels, established in 2000, is one of the world's fastest growing hotel chains. The Antalya-based company owns and operates resort hotels and villas of the highest category, including urban hotels in countries such as Azerbaijan, Croatia, Georgia, Egypt, Libya, Switzerland, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates.



Rixos Khadisha Shymkent, the first ever five star hotel in South Kazakhstan, not only looks splendid but also wants to awe you with services inside.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Kazakh Wins Women's Mogul Freestyle World Cup in Finland



By Dmitry Lee

Yulia Galysheva of Kazakhstan won the gold medal in dual moguls at the freestyle skiing World Cup races Dec. 13 in Ruka, Finland.

Galysheva finished ahead of Olympic champion and bronze medalist in Sochi 2014 Hannah Kearney of the U.S. in the semis and beat the silver medalist in Sochi 2014 Chloe Dufour-Lapointe of Canada for gold in the finals.

In Sochi, 2014 Galysheva finished seventh in the individual division. After the Sochi Games she retired but last summer returned to racing.

In dual moguls, athletes race in pairs in the finals and are ranked against each other.

Career highlights

Asian Winter Games
2011 – Almaty, Gold, Moguls
2011 – Almaty, Gold, Dual moguls
World Cup Podiums
2010 – Meribel, Gold, Dual moguls
2012 – Beida Lake, Bronze, Moguls
2013 – Deer Valley, Bronze, Dual moguls
2013 – Åre, Bronze, Moguls
2013 – Åre, Silver, Dual moguls
2013 – Lake Placid, Silver, Moguls

Carlos Martorell Bakes to Coach Kazakh Youth Football Team

Staff Report

The Football Federation of Kazakhstan presented Spaniard Carlos Martorell Bakes during a Dec. 20 press conference as the new coach of Kazakhstan's youth football team (U-17).

Bakes has a masters degree in coaching methodology and a Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) PRO A category coaching license that he obtained while working with the Barcelona football club. This type of license is the highest that can

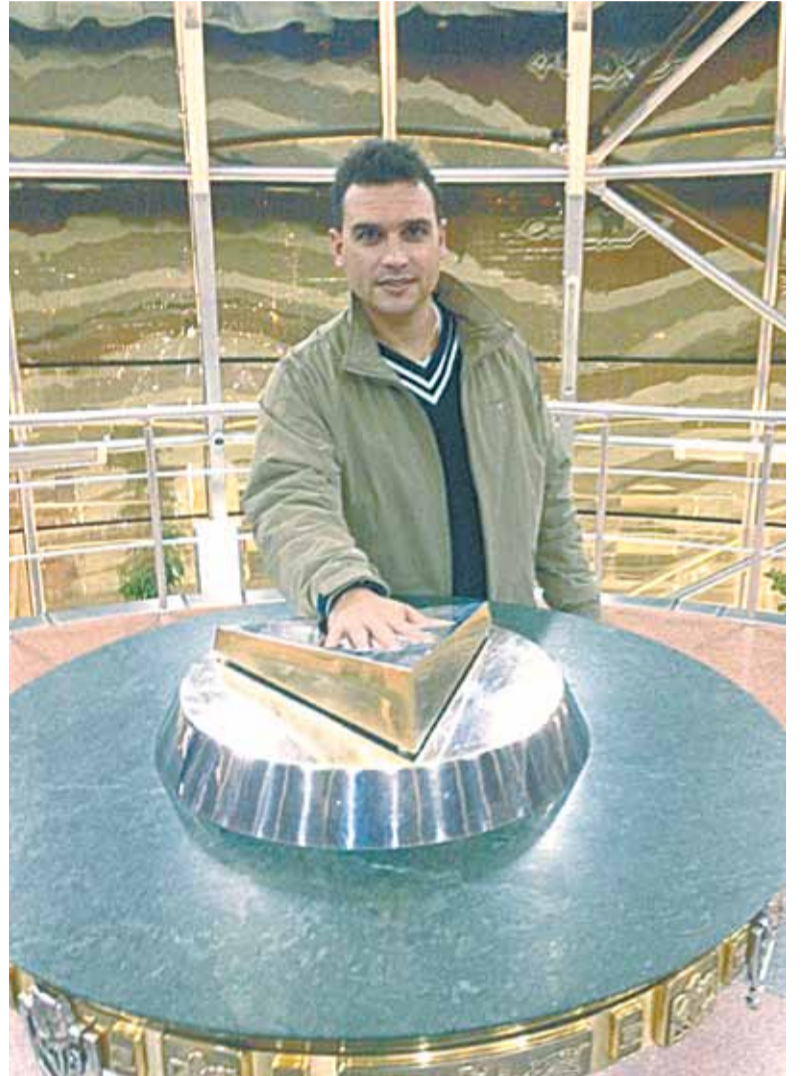
be obtained in the Spanish football league.

According to sports portal Sports.kz, Bakes worked as a mentor for the children's team (under 12 years) of the Football Federation of Catalonia. He also trained the Azerbaijani team Khazar-

Lankaran, before resigning in February 2013.

Bakes visited Astana this summer as part of the Royal Spanish Football Federation delegation, which discussed cooperation with Kazakh football federation representatives.

Spanish FC Astana 1964 Director Develops Football in Kazakhstan, Feels at Home in the Country



Miquel Riera

Continued from Page B1

Tell us an interesting story, perhaps amusing or funny, that you have encountered in Kazakhstan.

Since the first day, it surprised me a lot how to use private taxis in Astana [just by flagging them]. In Europe, this is forbidden because it can be very dangerous, but in Astana it has been normal during these four months. I maybe have used 100 private taxis and it has always been safe and the taxi drivers are very kind to me. I get asked a lot about me, the country of my traditions. ...For me it is very funny having to negotiate the price before getting into the taxi. Another thing I find funny is the Alatau Sport Complex; many children want to take pictures with me...

I would like to say that I feel very

proud to work in Astana. I have started to love Kazakhstan and the people from Astana. I believe Astana is an amazing city and I am all for promotion of the capital everywhere in Europe. When I am in Europe, I miss Astana and the Kazakh traditions. I am learning Russian because I want to communicate with the people by myself without a translator. I feel the people from Astana respect and appreciate me and my job, especially after the Spanish tournament that we attended in November. I would like to thank [FC Astana 1964 president] Galym Ibrayev because he brought me to the team as his personal choice and I hope not to disappoint him. I respect and love Kazakhstan. I feel like I am also Kazakh. I feel very comfortable here. I have a Kazakh mind and blood.

Almaty Mayor Says Hosting Olympics Would Be Profitable

By Kseniya Voronina

Almaty City Akim (Mayor) Akhmetzhan Yessimov said during a Dec. 19 Central Communications Service briefing that hosting the Winter Olympics in Almaty in 2020 would be profitable for the city and that only one new structure would have to be built if the city is chosen to host the 2020 games.

Yessimov said that unlike Sochi, which had to build almost all its Olympic venues from scratch, Almaty already possesses almost all of the infrastructure it needs to host the games.

"I have recently reported that two palaces of sports and an athletic village will be constructed in light of the coming Universiade 2017. Thus, only a bobsleigh track has to be built for the 2022 Win-

ter Olympics. All other objects are provided," explained Yessimov.

The city's existing major sports venues, such as the Shymbulak Ski Resort, Medeu Skating Rink and the Palace of Sports, were reconstructed and modernised in preparation for the 2011 Asian Winter Games. Modern ski and biathlon tracks, as well as what is considered to be one of the three best ski jumps in the world were built for the 2011 games.

Yessimov also noted that the issue of high costs was discussed during a visit to Almaty in the fall by International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach.

"I asked him if it was true that the organisers of the Sochi Olympics made a profit. He said yes – the operating expenses were fully paid off and the organisers have even had a profit. I would say all winter Olympic Games are profitable," Yessimov said.

Creating an Image of the Country through Sports

By Tasthanbek Yessentayev

In recent decades, Kazakhstan has become a rightful member of international society. Moreover, our country is always advancing its leadership in all directions: political, economic and other fields. The sport field is not an exception.

Everyone knows that Kazakhstan is a country that is dynamically developing in all directions, while at the same time maintaining unity and accord in society. Achievements allow us to go ahead confidently and consequently address issues on Kazakhstan's joining the 30 most-developed countries in the world.

It is possible to say that sport is an area where we have already achieved that level. Our team's places in the biggest international sports events, namely the Olympics and Asian games, and regional and international championships, have proven it.

We should highlight a surge of interest caused by the Asian Games in South Korea, Alem Barys, the first international wrestling tournament in Pavlodar, and the world championship in weightlifting, which was recently held in Almaty. Thanks to the victories of Kazakh athletes in the international arena, today interest in the sport has sharply increased, above all, among young people.



We should emphasise forming a positive image of our country as a world sports power, the result of hosting major international competitions and organising broadcasts to other countries.

Only two years remain before the start of the Universiade [in Almaty]. More than 3,000 athletes and officials from 58 countries are expected to visit our country. The analysis shows that year after year the number of participating countries and athletes increases, while athletic performance improves.

During the years of independence, Kazakhstan's student winter sports team took part in 11 Universiades and received 33 awards: 13 of them are gold, seven are silver and 13 are bronze.

President Nursultan Naz-

bayev personally initiated the nomination of Almaty to host the Winter Olympic Games and today Kazakhstan is closer than ever to becoming its organiser. Beijing is a very serious competitor, but our chances are high. The benefits of Kazakhstan's bid include stable economic development, favourable geographic location (Eurasian zone), suitable climatic conditions and availability of winter sports facilities, which were built for the Asian Games 2011 and are being built for the Universiade 2017.

The analysis conducted by Doctor of Economics Professor Rustem Nureyev on modern Olympic Games shows that such comprehensive global competition should be seen as a commercial and investment project. In the history of the modern Olympic Games, three models of management and financing were identified.

The first model of public administration and finance presumes that the proportion of state involvement is more than 67 percent. Such countries as the Soviet Union (Moscow, 1980 – 97 percent), Canada (Montreal, 1976 – 95 percent) and China (Beijing, 2008 – 84 percent) used this model of financing.

The second is a mixed model, where the share of state participation ranges from 33 to 67 percent.

South Korea (Seoul, 1988 – 46 percent) and Spain (Barcelona, 1992 – 38 percent) hosted games in accordance with this model.

The third is a model of private management and financing, where the share of state participation is less than 33 percent. Australia (Sydney, 2000 – 30 percent) and the United States (Atlanta, 1996 – 15 percent, Los Angeles, 1984 – 2 percent) implemented this model.

Recently, Russia adopted a mixed model to host the Olympics in Sochi, while profit amounted to \$10 billion. Japan officially announced that it would be able to gain approximately \$30 billion in profit from the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

These financing models demonstrate that not a single Olympics was held without state participation. Such large complex games are the most important sport and cultural event, which attract the attention of billions of people in more than 200 countries. Thanks to the Olympics, a government creates a favourable sport image of the country and gains international reputation and recognition.

At the same time, the nation creates new jobs and new sport and social businesses which will contribute to the economy. Thus, we can emphasise that the Olympics are held by the country to strengthen its international prestige, con-

solidate society and develop infrastructure, which influences the welfare of the people.

Financial sources, which make up the modern Olympic Games budget, can be divided into external and internal. The external include donations, sponsored funds and trust receipts from government agencies.

Internal sources consist of revenue from selling television broadcasting rights of the Olympics, tickets to sporting events, licensing, granting rights to post information on the Internet and sell Olympic goods through online stores, selling stamps, coins, souvenirs and a lottery.

We have preliminary calculations for the preparation and holding of the Winter Olympics in Almaty. Taking into consideration that the city already has almost all the infrastructure, costs will be relatively small.

This sum includes funds for hosting the Winter Games in 2022, as well as for preparations, construction of the remaining objects and modernisation of urban infrastructure.

Currently, the main indicator of the development of mass sport and promotion of healthy lifestyle is the organisation of sports events. At present, the country has held 27,655 sports events, 17,811 of which were conducted in the coun-

tryside. These events involved more than three and a half million people, including 2.2 million in rural areas.

A well-developed network of sports facilities is of great importance for the development of mass sports. The total number of such facilities is 34,234, including 21,915 in rural areas.

The ministry also plans step-by-step construction of fitness centres through co-financing from the national and local budgets and attracting sponsors. Prior to 2017, we plan to launch 43 centres, with 14 of them opened this year. In addition, at the expense of the Confederation of Combat and Strength Sports, two fitness centres in Semey and Turkestan and a multifunctional complex centre under the World Academy of Boxing and Martial Arts were built, while construction of a martial arts competition arena in Astana has also begun.

By 2020, we expect to increase the network of sports clubs in educational institutions of all levels by 40 percent, while advancing the number of people engaged in physical culture and sports to 40 percent of the population by 2030 and 60 percent by 2050.

The author is Vice-Minister of Culture and Sport of Kazakhstan.

CAPITAL

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Charity Ball in Astana Raises \$71,000 for Vulnerable Children



By Alina Usmanova

ASTANA – The Dec. 14 7th Winter Charity Ball at Radisson Hotel Astana raised 13 million tenge (US\$70,815) for educational programmes for children from orphanages and low-income families, the organisers said.

The ball was sponsored by the Nur Otan party and organised with the help of the Bolashak Association and Radisson Hotel Astana.

The event was opened by Miss Kazakhstan 2013 Aidai Issayeva, who performed a classic polonaise, and included dances ranging from the Viennese waltz to rock 'n' roll. The ball also included performances by Kazakh singers, including the ChickFlick band and Aizhan Sultanova. Virtuoso pianist Oleg Pereverzev also performed as well as Zhanar Dugalova, the recent winner of the international song contest Turkvision-2014, who sang her hit "Izin korem."

"I gladly accepted the offer to become a participant of this wonderful ball. I think that the guests present here, actors, dancers – all contribute to one noble cause. I wish that, in general, there were [more] charitable activities," said Dugalova.

The culmination of the evening was an auction of art and other

valued objects, including boxing gloves autographed by Gennady Golovkin, a yellow jersey of the Tour de France winner Vincenzo Nibali and an original ball and jersey of the Arsenal football club autographed by stars Mesut Ozil, Aaron Ramsey, Jack Wilshere, Danny Welbeck and Olivier Giroud.

The funds raised in the two years since the launch of the charity ball have been used to renovate the SOS Children's Village Astana and Nur orphanage in Talgar. The funds have also been used to help construct game and concert halls and purchase specialised medical equipment for the Child Mental Health and Social Institution of Astana.

The event was part of the Nur Otan party's Baqytty balalyq (Kazakh for Happy Childhood) project, which seeks to aid orphans by improving the legal framework for their adoption and to cultivate respect for adoption in Kazakhstan. In that effort, more than 40 amendments to three codes and three laws on the protection of the rights of orphans have been prepared and passed, career guidance has been provided to high school aged orphans and 359 apartments have been provided to orphans and families that adopted them.

Rixos Astana Celebrates Int'l Tango Day with Party

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Rixos President Astana held a Friend's Party for partners and colleagues Dec. 11 as a way to show gratitude for their camaraderie and cooperation.



Luciano Sozzo

The loyal friends of the hotel had the chance to witness tango master classes, music and shows and even won prizes through a drawing at the end of the evening.

The Astana Times used this opportunity to interview the general manager, 48-year-old Luciano Sozzo who hails from Carmiano in the Lecce province in southeast Italy.

"I have been [in Astana] for nine months," he said. "I like Astana and Kazakhstan very much because I like the vibe and energy in Kazakhstan. There are a lot of things to do and a lot of projects and opportunities and that's very good."

Sozzo, who has been in the hotel business for more than 33 years, previously held posts in Italy and The Netherlands and for the last two years as a general manager in Kharkiv, Ukraine. He admitted that the cultural priorities set by the country are somewhat contradictory.

"There is a bit of contradiction;

on the one hand the country is developing very fast and on the other, there is this cultural trend that adheres to old traditions," he noted.

Rixos President is located in the heart of the capital's left bank, close to all amenities and in the centre of city happenings. Sozzo underlined, however, that despite being in the midst of a fast-growing and bustling city, Rixos sticks to preserving human relations and a homely feeling for clients.

"All the other hotels (I have worked for) were well recognised but (what makes this one different), especially for Kazakhstan, is the temper of hospitality, because Rixos President Astana is not just a hotel but a part of the community in Astana. It is not just a place where one goes to sleep and that has food, but a real live place for many other things. This hotel completely integrates with the city. Our bet is on human resources, that is our main capital and we want to invest in human resources because a product can be beautiful but without human interaction, it's worthless. And this is what our clients appreciate. They come back because first of all it's a beautiful hotel and has status, but also because of the service. They come here and they know our staff and are recognised by our staff as well. We make everyone feel at home, make them feel comfortable."

The hotel has already undergone many changes under his management, but Sozzo does not intend to stop yet.

"In the past nine months we have changed a lot of things. We invested a lot of money to train the staff, to renovate some parts of the hotel and invest in some training programmes, but now our challenge is to start the new renovation because the hotel will turn 10 years

old in 2015. We will celebrate its birthday and we would like to start the renovation. It is already an important hotel with a beautiful environment, [especially] the impact of the entrance alone. But what we would like to do is to create the most beautiful hotel in this part of Asia. It is very important to us," he stressed.

As for the quality of the service provided at one of the top hotels in the city, Sozzo didn't hesitate to explain why the administration under his management continues to hire foreign experts in the industry to train the staff.

"We invite people from abroad to train our staff and other staff in Kazakhstan. We want to have excellent butlers and one of the butlers we invited to train our staff, who was here in July, is the ex-butler of the Queen of England. We also invited an Italian specialist in revenue management to train our administrative staff. We will keep inviting specialists from abroad who we can't find here, not for showing off but because we want to introduce new ways of service. That's the main reason we want to invite foreign experts."

"As for today's Friend's Party, I would like to say that all these guests interact with our staff on a daily basis," Sozzo said. "These are our partners and this event is an opportunity to show our gratitude to them for their support and cooperation. We also want to establish human relations instead of purely business relations, because that can make a difference. We also wanted to give a tango master class because Dec. 11 is International Tango Day. This day is celebrated around the world and we decided to celebrate it along with our Friend's Party tonight."



36 Buses Added to Astana's Most Popular Routes

By Ainur Kuramysova

ASTANA – Astana Akim (Mayor) Adilbek Dzhakysbekov explained to the public on Dec. 11 some of the features of the city's 36 new public buses.

The new buses have low floors and are equipped with ramps for transporting riders with disabilities. They are also designed to withstand Astana's climate. The buses also have three-chamber glazing, air conditioning and heating and special flooring. They also feature video surveillance systems, automated passenger counting, Wi-Fi and a passenger validation and information system. The buses

are produced by the Italian company IVECO.

It is estimated that 720,000 people, the majority of Astana's population, ride public buses daily.

Dzhakysbekov directed that the buses be utilised on the city's busiest routes and on Dec. 12 some of the new buses were added to routes 9 and 10.

The akim also noted during

his presentation that the public has complained in the past about crowded buses and long waits between buses.

A second express bus was also added on the route from the city's main railway station to the airport. The fare is 120 tenge (US\$ 65) for adults, 60 tenge (US\$ 33) for children.

Two-hundred-sixty-two of Astana's buses are equipped with ramps for those with special needs, which include the city's more than 18,000 people with disabilities.

It is estimated that 720,000 people, the majority of Astana's population, ride public buses daily.

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