



President Nazarbayev's Political Address to UN Security Council Presented



Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov presents President Nazarbayev's Political Address to UNSC members during the UNSC open debate in New York on Jan. 10.

By Galiaskar Seitghan

NEW YORK – Kazakhstan's newly-minted Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov spoke at the ministerial-level open debate of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on "Maintenance of International Peace and Security," Jan. 10, where he presented President Nursultan Nazarbayev's policy address to UNSC members.

The debate was chaired by Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström and was attended by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, foreign ministers and deputy foreign ministers of Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, and Ukraine, as well as permanent representatives of China, Russia, the United States and other UN member states.

During the debate, members of the Security Council and representatives of a wide range of UN member states declared their national priorities in conflict prevention and sustaining peace and expressed support for the new Secretary-General's work in these priority areas.

Presenting Nazarbayev's address on the occasion of the beginning of Kazakhstan's duties as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for

2017-2018, Abdrakhmanov highlighted that the appeal was based on the principles of the Kazakh President's earlier Manifesto "The World. The 21st Century."

The new document, "Kazakhstan's Concept Vision on Sustaining Global Partnership for Secure, Just and Prosperous World," heavily stresses the need for joint efforts and cooperation in strengthening international peace and security.

Among other things, it declares Astana's renewed commitment to help bring closer the goal of building a world free of nuclear weapons by the UN's 100th anniversary and to rid humanity of wars and conflicts, while promoting the strong connection between peace, security and development, as well as highlighting the so called "Security-Development Nexus" and the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in 2015.

Astana intends to "work on an equal basis with all Security Council members to promote compromise and consensus" to help strengthen international peace and security, the address reads in its direct appeal to UNSC members. Foremost are the so called P5, which are the five permanent members holding the veto right – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

According to Nazarbayev, "Kazakhstan will work in a balanced

and unbiased manner on the council's entire agenda keeping in mind the paramount importance of maintaining and strengthening peace and security."

In this regard, the address identifies some of Astana's priorities in its work as a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Among them are: moving towards a world free of nuclear weapons, preventing the threat of global war, promoting peace in Afghanistan and creating a regional peace zone in Central Asia, shaping a global antiterrorist coalition (network) under the auspices of the UN, promoting the peaceful development of Africa, adapting the UNSC's activities to the demands of the 21st century and elaborating a set-up for regular meetings of UNSC member states at the level of heads of state and governments to strengthen a collective political will to address global challenges.

As Nazarbayev stresses in his address, "Kazakhstan is determined to work with all member states of the council on these priorities without political expediency in an open, objective, balanced responsible and constructive way."

In this regard, the document concludes by saying that "Kazakhstan counts on the support from partners for its initiatives, which have the important goal of making the world

in the 21st century safer, just and more prosperous."

Abdrakhmanov also drew attention to the importance of joint efforts to strengthen preventive diplomacy, promote confidence-building measures, work towards non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and seek conflict resolutions.

According to the Kazakh delegation, President Nazarbayev's address was received well by the debate participants. It was also reportedly registered as an official document of the UN Security Council.

Earlier in the morning, during his meeting with Guterres, the Kazakh Foreign Minister discussed Astana's agenda in the Security Council and the multifaceted cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United Nations, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry's press service said.

A day earlier, new Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the UN Kairat Umarov presented credentials to Guterres. According to a press release from Astana, following the formal ceremony, Umarov and Guterres congratulated each other on the start of their duties and expressed confidence in strengthening the partnership between Kazakhstan and the UN. On behalf of the Kazakh leadership, Umarov expressed support for the plans of the UN's new head to promote multilateral efforts in conflict prevention, peace-making, peace-building and long-term sustainable development.

Having conveyed President Nazarbayev's best wishes, Umarov addressed the projected participation of the UN in the EXPO 2017 exhibition in Astana and the intensification of international efforts in resolving the situation in Afghanistan under the UN guidance.

The Kazakh Foreign Ministry reported that Guterres referred to his meeting with Nazarbayev on Nov. 23 last year in Astana and commended Kazakhstan's record of engaging in partnerships on the international arena. In this regard, he stressed the UN's interest in expanding political dialogue and interaction with Kazakhstan and using the Central Asian nation's potential as an international mediator in resolving regional conflicts, given Kazakhstan's new role as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for 2017-2018, which opens up wider prospects for such engagement.

Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov's visit to New York, his first as the most senior Kazakh diplomat, will conclude Jan. 11.

Kazakhstan Provides Additional Humanitarian Aid to Syria



By Aigerim Seisebayeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan sent about 500 tonnes of humanitarian aid on Jan. 6 to the people of Syria in the form of food, including flour, canned meat, rice, pasta and tea.

Russian Ministry of Defense rendered its assistance in delivering the aid, which was brought by Kuznetsov dry-cargo ship to Tartus Port Jan. 5. The unloading and handover of the cargo to Syrian authorities began Jan. 6. Kazinform news agency reports. Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Jordan Azamat Berdybai handed the humanitarian aid to the Syrian side in the person of President of the Provincial Council of Tartus Yasser Dibba.

The Higher Relief Commission of the Syrian Arab Republic will oversee the distribution of the Kazakh aid.

"Although the international community takes all required efforts, the humanitarian situation in the country remains catastrophic. In this regard, President Nursultan Nazarbayev made a decision to send humanitarian aid, namely food, to Syria. The 500 tonnes of cargo delivered in 33 containers include primarily food and medications and are meant for the Syrian people suffering the consequences of the six-year-long war. Kazakhstan backs the measures launched

by the international community and the actions of the Syrian authorities and the opposition aimed at speedy ceasefire and determining the political future of Syria by means of dialogue and reconciliation," Berdybai said at a meeting with the Syrian delegation.

"We want to thank the people of Kazakhstan, Kazakh President Nazarbayev and the government of Kazakhstan for not being indifferent and neutral towards our situation and for expressing compassion and sending humanitarian aid," the officials of Tartus Province said, according to the Kazakh media.

This is not the first aid Kazakhstan provided for the Syrian people. In 2012, Kazakhstan allocated \$400,000 through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to the governments of Jordan and Lebanon to provide humanitarian assistance to Syrians residing in refugee camps.

Also, in October 2015, at the end of negotiations between representatives of the Syrian opposition in Astana, Kazakhstan agreed to provide \$316,600 in medicines, food and equipment for Syrian refugees based on the Turkish-Syrian border.

Kazakhstan has also offered to host additional Syrian peace talks in its capital city of Astana at the end of January. Two rounds of peace talks were held in Astana in 2015.

President Appoints New Foreign Minister, Minister of National Economy

By Aigerim Seisebayeva

ASTANA – Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev appointed on Dec. 28 Kairat Abdrakhmanov the country's new Minister of Foreign Affairs and Timur Suleimenov the new Minister of National Economy, according to a release from the President's press service.

Abdrakhmanov, who had been serving as Permanent Representative to the United Nations, replaced Erlan Idrissov.

Abdrakhmanov was born April 21, 1964. He graduated from the Kazakh State University majoring in history. He served as director of various departments of the foreign ministry, ambassador to Israel, Austria and permanent representative of Kazakhstan to international organisations in Vienna as well as twice as deputy foreign minister.

He occupied the post of Kazakhstan's permanent representative to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) during Kazakhstan's one-year OSCE chairmanship.

Since 2013, Abdrakhmanov has served as permanent representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations. During this period Kazakhstan campaigned for and was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). He has the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

On April 13, 1944 the Supreme Council of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR)

established the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. This is the official start of the history of Kazakh diplomacy. On March 15, 1946 the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the Kazakh SSR was transformed into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After its establishment, the ministry engaged mainly in protocol and consular issues. The republic had no direct foreign policy and economic access to the world community until its independence and the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Next year, Kazakhstan marks 25 years of sovereign diplomacy.

New Minister of National Economy Suleimenov was born April 5, 1978. He graduated from Pavlodar State University (2000, 2006) and from the Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland (USA) as a Bolashak scholarship recipient. Suleimenov has an MBA in finance and is certified by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

Suleimenov started his career as chief advisor at Ernst and Young Kazakhstan. In recent years, he worked as director of the Department of Tax Accounting and Tax Planning of Exploration Production for KazMunayGas. He also worked as Vice-Minister of Economy and Budget Planning of Kazakhstan in 2009-2010, Vice-Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Kazakhstan in 2010-2012), and member of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission for Economy and Financial Policy since February 2012.

Kazakhstan Participates in First UN Security Council Meeting

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan attended its first meeting Jan. 3 as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and on Jan. 4 appointed former Kazakh Ambassador to the United States Kairat Umarov as Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations.

According to the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the meeting included five new non-permanent members of the UNSC and was followed by a traditional working lunch for the council's heads of delegations, namely Bolivia, China, Egypt, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Ukraine and Uruguay.

The Mission of the Kingdom of Sweden hosted the event, which was chaired by Sweden's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Olof Skoog.

The delegation of Kazakhstan was represented by Chargé d'Affaires Barlybay Sadykov. Sadykov announced Kazakhstan's priorities,

including preventive diplomacy, confidence-building measures, non-proliferation, conflict prevention and resolution, mediation and countering international terrorism.

In particular, Sadykov mentioned Nazarbayev's initiative to convene the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) that was put forward from the UN rostrum 25 years ago. Today, CICA makes practical contributions to strengthening security in the wider Asia-Pacific region, he noted. Also, Sadykov mentioned the significance of Nazarbayev's Manifesto "The World. The 21st Century," and expressed hope the UNSC will ensure a war-free and conflict-free world by the UN Centenary in 2045.

Later, the council held a closed consultation, where the UNSC Work Programme for January was approved. The council also held Dec. 4 closed consultations on the situations in Syria (concerning the issue with chemical weapons) and Iraq (humanitarian aspect).

The High-Level Open Debate on "Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace" will be Jan. 10. During the meeting, council members

will announce their priorities and support for the new UN leadership. The debate will be attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and other UNSC foreign ministers.

On Jan. 17, the UN will hold a traditional quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question at the level of Permanent Representatives.

In accordance with the council's decision, a number of briefings and closed consultations will also take place in January. In particular, the UNSC will discuss the following countries and regions: Syria (political, humanitarian and chemical weapon tracks), Iraq (humanitarian track), Yemen, Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan (including Darfur and Abyei) and South Sudan, West Africa and the Sahel, Mali, Somalia, Cyprus, Colombia, as well as implementation of Resolution 2231 on the Iranian nuclear programme.

Two meetings of the subsidiary bodies: Committee 751/1907 concerning Somalia and Eritrea, and Committee 1267/1989/2253 concerning terrorist groups ISIL/

DAESH and Al Qaeda will also be arranged under Kazakhstan's chairmanship.

In addition, this month the council is expected to adopt resolutions on Cyprus and the Central African Republic, as well as on the issues of chemical weapons in Syria in case of consensus among UNSC members.

New UN representative Umarov was appointed by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and had been serving as ambassador to the United States since 2013. He brings with him a wealth of experience having served as the country's ambassador to India and the U.S. as well as the deputy foreign minister.

Kazakhstan's flag was raised in a special ceremony in front of the hall of the UN Security Council in New York on Dec. 31, 2016, signifying the assumption by the country of its duties as a non-permanent member of the body for 2017-2018. The plates with the name of Kazakhstan were also set at the negotiating table in the Security Council room and the room for private consultations, the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced in a Jan. 1 press release.

INSIDE

NATION
Appreciation for Every Crumb: A Famine Legacy **A2**
Military Medicine Centre Implements Global Best Practices Into Training **A2**

EURASIA&WORLD
EAEU Adapts Regulations toward a Single Customs Code **A3**
Iran, Kazakhstan to Enhance Cooperation; Ink Agreements on Health, Shipping, Travel, Labour and Trade **A3**

EDITORIALS
After Ups and Downs of 2016, Kazakhstan Ready and Optimistic for 2017 **A6**
Kazakhstan to Seek Unity during Tenure on UNSC **A6**

OPINIONS
ODILOV: Kazakhstan Reforms Minerals Legislation amid Efforts to Attract Investment **A7**
ILESANMI: 'We are Pursuing Ambitious Goals', says Nazarbayev University Provost **A7**

NATION&CAPITAL
Dombra Cover of Metallica Song Strikes Chord **B1**
IRENA to Participate in EXPO 2017 **B6**

NATION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Appreciation for Every Crumb: A Famine Legacy

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Kazakh culture has been shaped by events cruel and kind over the centuries. One of the saddest and most influential in recent history was the great famine of 1931–1933 caused by Stalin's policies of collectivisation. According to some estimates, about 40 percent of the ethnic Kazakh population of that time lost their lives during those years: more or less 1 million people.

"My great grandmother, Kamilya Serikova, had 13 children during the years of famine and only two survived," Almarat Serikov, 33, told the Astana Times. Serikov is an engineer from Ust-Kamenogorsk whose great-grandparents felt the pangs of famine first-hand.

Serikov's great-grandparents lived in the village of Algabas, in the Almaty region, and they often told their children about the hard times of that period.

"When children fall ill these days, sometimes with the efforts of the whole world, people manage to cure them – by fundraising, saving money and other means," Serikov said. "To me it's a great misfortune, it's the scariest thing ever, when children get sick. Every parent wants to save their child. I always think of my great grand-



Monument in Astana honouring victims of the great famine.

mother – a woman with feelings, a mother, who lost 11 children – they were not sick with incurable diseases, her children were just dying of hunger during the years of famine in 1930–32. Every time I think about it, it breaks my heart. Some of them did die from diseases but that's because at that time the level of medicine was low. Perhaps if we think about those days with our modern views, some children probably just died from unsanitary living conditions."

As if that wasn't bad enough, with the famine still in recent memory, Serikov's great-grandfather was forced to the front lines

during the Second World War, leaving his children with only their mother.

"Her husband, my great-grandfather, later went to war when he was over 50 years old. He was forced to or framed to – we don't know now for sure – but he had to leave the two children with his wife in wartime. Some relatives claimed that one of the neighbours, who didn't want to go to war, paid off the officials and perhaps their child was passed over and my great-grandfather was sent instead."

"My great-grandmother was not educated and was living way be-

low the poverty line. Our relatives claim that passing through a construction site from work in school (where she had worked as a cleaning staff) she brought home one brick a day. They say that's how she had enough supplies to build a small house. This is just what people back then had to go and live through."

Serikova's older son only studied through four grades. Her younger son did finish school but couldn't even go to school until he was eight or nine years old because he didn't have shoes.

"At some point they had one pair of shoes for both," Serikov recalls from his childhood memories. "One of them – the younger is my grandfather – he used to tell me that he went to school until the winter came, then he just ran across the steppe with bare feet. He saw cows sitting on the ground. He would run up to a cow, kick it, and when the animal moved he sat in the warm place, warmed his feet up and continued to the next cow. During really cold weather he had to skip school. For two years he couldn't attend school at all."

Serikov refused to sift through history's darkest pages in search of blame or justice, focusing instead on his great-grandparents' legacy.

"Back then people were so desperate and there were so many heart-breaking stories. Many chil-

dren were found in the streets because their parents couldn't feed them."

Having overcome challenges that now seem unimaginable, the Serikovs today honour their family's legacy by doing well for their own families.

"Eventually, my grandfather became a director at a power supply company and was managing over 2,000 people," Serikov said proudly. "His older brother, who didn't finish school, worked as a boiler fireman all his life."

The years of the famine have imprinted survival traditions on Serikov's family, he said.

"After going through such an ordeal, people of those years and many generations following were brought up to not waste food, of course," Serikov said. "They still see food differently: even being a director and having it in abundance, my grandfather never threw out food. Food, saving and managing resources to the fullest capacity were paramount priorities in his life. I believe our generation should also remember this legacy because this world has a lot of surprises in store, especially natural disasters and things like that. We must be prepared for anything, and appreciate every crumb. If your loaf of bread is going bad, why not make croutons or dry toast?"

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the law Dec. 30 "On introducing amendments and addenda to some legislative acts of Kazakhstan on fingerprint and genomic registration." It is aimed at bringing legislation into conformity with the law "On fingerprint and genomic registration," reported Akorda.kz. Fingerprint registration will be taken when residents apply for passports, identity cards or identity documents. Foreign residents are fingerprinted when they apply for visas.

Almaty will join the European Healthy Cities network of the World Health Organisation (WHO) this year, reported Zakon.kz. The project coordinator issued positive remarks in response to the initiative of the Almaty Akim (Mayor) and City Health Department. WHO Healthy City status will improve the well-being of the population and make Almaty more attractive for medical tourism. The key tasks of the Densaulyk and Almaty 2020 development programmes will also be effectively solved in terms of implementing the best international practices in health preservation and promotion.

A new poultry farm with a production capacity up to 4,000 tonnes of halal chicken meat per year was opened in the Zhambyl region in late December, reported the KazAgro press service. "The project allows us to provide the nearby districts with quality eco-friendly food production and increase tax revenues to the regional budget. This also has a positive effect on improving the well-being of the region and about 150 people got new jobs... Our products will be available beginning February of next year," said Zhambyl Region Akim (Governor) Karim Kokrekbaev. The project worth of 2 billion tenge (US\$5 million) was launched with the participation of KazAgroFinance. A network of communication systems including water supply, sewerage, gas supply and electrification was installed and water intake facilities were constructed as part of the Business Road Map 2020 programme.

Twenty-one street workout playgrounds were installed in Astana, Almaty, Aktau, Aktobe, Shymkent and Zhanaozen in 2016, according to Zakon.kz. The project is initiated by the National Olympic Committee with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Sport, Street Workout Federation and local government bodies. The federation plans to hold free training in the summer season. All sports areas are located in accessible spots that allow residents to engage in sports at convenient times. More than 50 people can train in the workout zones at the same time. The project aims to promote mass sports in the regions and attract children and youth to physical training.

The Tau-Ken Temir plant plans to reach its full production capacity of 21,000–23,000 tonnes of technical refined silicon this year, according to Zakon.kz. The plant produced more than 19,500 tonnes in 2016. "We export mainly to the western countries. About 50 percent goes to North America, 40 percent to European countries and only 10 percent to Belarus and Russia. We will start to produce microsilica from waste products soon. This will allow us to further reduce the cost and reduce the burden on the environment," said Tau-Ken Temir Chairman Murat Zhukenov. The German-made ore-smelting furnace allowed the plant to compete with industry leaders both in quality and cost.

Approximately 11,000 farmers took part in trainings in 25 agricultural priority areas at the Agrocompetencies centre in 2016. About 700 seminars conducted by foreign and local experts were also organised as part of the project. "The priority directions of agriculture were in focus including dairy breeding, beef farming, sheep breeding, crop farming, oil and feed crop and greenhouse vegetables. We invited 25 foreign and about 30 local experts and 120 lecturers. More than 50,000 users have visited our online resource farmers.kz since its launch," said Agrocompetencies centre head Toleutai Rakhimbekov.

Military Medicine Centre Implements Global Best Practices Into Training

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – The Armed Services Medicine Centre of the Kazakh Defence Ministry is bringing the country's military and medical specialists' training in line with best international practices and introducing new academic programmes and regional advances into their work, the ministry's press service reported.

Training and development is conducted across a variety of for-

mats, from round tables to workshops and longer curricula, the ministry said in a statement.

Specialists in armed services medicine from Kazakhstan and foreign states are invited to exchange experience and create new projects through the centre.

This year, courses were arranged for surgical medical experts of the military units and departments of Almaty's regional garrison. Leading surgeons from Sweden conducted the training.

"It is remarkable that principles of triaging [sorting the wounded] was a separate topic explored during these curricula. This is an essentially important topic for military health professionals because in the context of violent conflict, prioritising healthcare delivery with many injured people at hand is the most difficult decision that has to be made," the press service said.

The Armed Services Medical Centre also raised the question of training health care personnel and

introducing new academic programmes while a Kazakh armed forces delegation was visiting education facilities and military-medical facilities in Tokyo. Kazakh experts explored training methods for military-medical specialists and the use of mobile hospitals there.

The Astana Times previously reported about an experimental model of a terrestrial military robot that can operate as a scout during military actions in urban centres.

This land scout robot, developed by the Military Science and Research Centre of Kazakhstan's National Defence University, is still in the testing phase. However if the nation's military-industrial complex becomes interested in the new technology, in two years a small batch sample might be evacuating wounded, laying mines, helping put out fires and assisting in many other important functions during military actions.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan to Reopen Section of M-39 Highway in February

By Aigerim Seiseimbayeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have reached an agreement to reopen Highway M-39 in February. The highway has been closed for 10 years.

"After commissioning, the new road will reduce the distance [needed to be travelled from Tashkent to Samarkand] by 65 kilometres. This will contribute to further strengthening of

relations between the two countries and the development of trade and tourism. I also hope it will strengthen ties between the Uzbek capital of Tashkent and the South Kazakhstan region," said Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Uzbekistan Erik Utembayev following a Jan. 6 meeting with Ambassador at Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan Ilhom Nematov in southern Kazakhstan.

The meeting was also attended by Kazakhstan's Vice Minister for Investment and Development Roman Sklyar and Akim (Governor) of the South Kazakhstan region Zhanseit Tuymebayev.

They agreed to rebuild a 65-kilometre section of Highway M-39 (from the 887.8 km to the 911.9 km), which passes through the territory of the Maktaaral area and build a checkpoint along the highway. The highway's border area will also have a facility to

manage duty-free goods turnover.

After the completion of the reconstruction, residents of Tashkent will be able to get to Samarkand while avoiding a bypass road through Jizzakh, reducing the distance needed to be travelled from 89 km to 24.5 km.

Sklyar and Nematov expressed confidence that the agreement will strengthen international economic relations and improve trade turnover.

At the end of the meeting, Nematov thanked the Kazakh side for supporting the issue and noted the meeting was an example of developing bilateral cooperation.

"We came here with a noble mission of discussing the possible renewal of motor traffic on the M-39 highway. Back in 1998, we signed a bilateral agreement on the use of M-39 24.3 km. In the near future, we will open the road, and I hope traffic will be resumed," Nematov said.

Authorities Detain 16 Suspected Members of Banned Islamist Group

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan's state security service has detained 16

people since Dec. 21 on suspicion of inciting religious hatred and their involvement with Takfir wal-Hijra Islamist group.

The National Security Commit-

tee stated in its press release that it began special-forces raid on Dec. 21 to neutralise the cells of the Takfir wal-Hijra religious extremists organisation in Kazakhstan.

Raids were simultaneously carried out in the Almaty, Aktyubinsk, Atyrau regions and in the city of Almaty.

"Search operations where they [the suspects] live as well as other operational and investigative actions are being held," the committee said in the statement.

Established in Egypt in the 1960s, the Islamist group was recognised as extremist in August 2014 by a court decision in the Kazakh capital and banned from the country.

Takfir wal-Hijra is listed as a terrorist organisation in the U.S., Russia, China, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and

a number of other countries, according to the press release.

"Members of this organisation are known to propagandise the principle of the so-called 'accusation of disbelief' or 'takfir'. The ideology of Al-Qaeda, Daesh [also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] and a number of other terrorist groups was built on this principle," the security body stated.

The security committee said Takfir wal-Hijra followers approve of the actions of terrorists in Iraq and Syria and in general, reject the country's secular government and constitutional laws.

Takfir wal-Hijra was previously named "Jama'at al-Muslimin," a radical Islamist group led by Egyptian agricultural engineer Shukri Mustafa that emerged in

Egypt in the 1960s as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The National Security Committee plans further updates to brief the public on its recent operations.

News outlets report that among other provinces, the security operation also covered the Aktobe region where a deadly Islamist attack killed 25 people, including 18 attackers, last June.

Most of the surviving attackers were recently sentenced to life in prison. Takfir wal-Hijra has not been linked to that attack.

"Thousands of nationals from Central Asian nations are known to be fighting alongside Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq, and authorities have long warned they could return and carry out attacks on home soil," Reuters news agency reported.



EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

The New York Times has included Kazakhstan as 26th on the list of 52 places to visit this year. "From oil state to luxury eco-destination," noted the editorial. "Ten years after Borat put it on tourist maps, Kazakhstan aims to be a refuge of Silk Road luxury. A boom of hotels in the capital, Astana, includes this year's openings of a St. Regis and Ritz-Carlton. But an earnest transition from oil state to eco-destination is also underway. Astana hosts the 2017 World Expo, which highlights future energy solutions and is home to a pavilion powered by clean energy, while the bio-diverse Tian Shan Mountains were included on UNESCO's 2016 World Heritage list. The tour outfitters Remote Lands and Intrepid Travel have also started new tours," it added.

China has announced a railway itinerary to London through Kazakhstan, Xinhua News Agency reported Jan. 4. The service will start from the Chinese city of Yiwu, "a famed wholesale market town in the eastern province of Zhejiang," according to the media. "The train will travel for 18 days over more than 12,000 kilometres to reach Britain from China." The route winds through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Belgium and France before arriving in London. Last summer, Chinese authorities announced plans to expand the country's rail network to 150,000 kilometres by 2020, including 30,000 kilometres of high-speed roads, a 24-percent increase from 2015 and 58-percent increase for the high-speed network.

Kazakhstan ranked fourth on the list of the largest importers of Georgian wine, reported regnum.ru. The nation imported 3.4 million bottles last year, according to the Georgian Ministry of Agriculture wine agency. The leading importer was Russia (more than 27.2 million bottles), followed by Ukraine (more than 5.8 million bottles) and China (up to 5.3 million bottles). In 2016, more than 50 million bottles were exported to 53 countries, 38 percent higher than in 2015, and totalled \$113.8 million, 16 percent higher than the previous year. The most popular Georgian wine was Kindzmarauli (more than 7.4 million bottles), followed by Mukuzani (more than 2.5 million bottles), Tsinandali (more than 2 million bottles), Akhasheni (more than 923,000 bottles) and Hvanchkara (more than 413,000 bottles).

Eighteen Kazakh doctors have completed training in Seoul, South Korea, as part of the Bolashak international programme, reported Khabar Agency. "In two months, the Kazakh medical workers learned to conduct laparoscopy procedures using a robot. The minimally-invasive procedure involves surgery through a small incision that allows avoiding blood loss. After such surgery, patients recover faster," noted the media. "We have been cooperating with Kazakhstan for four years," said KD Medical Research Centre head Kim Gon Su. "During this time, we have trained 150 Kazakh surgeons, general practitioners and urologists. Doctors from India, the Philippines, Russia and other countries pass trainings in the Korean hospitals. Doctors from Kazakhstan, who come within the Bolashak programme, are very responsible and demonstrate excellent skills." Some 700 applicants, including 24 doctors, won the Bolashak scholarship last year. The government-funded scholarship allows the recipients to study abroad.

Kazakh violinist Zagisha Kamil gave a solo concert in New York to the leaders of women's organisations, reported Kazakh TV. "She performed the works of famous Kazakh, U.S. and European composers. Yoo Soon-taek, wife of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, was among the honoured guests. Welcoming the Kazakh violinist, she mentioned the Kazakh musician's great skill and talent," noted the media. A graduate of the Kulyash Baiseitova music school, Kamil took classes from famous teacher Nina Patrusheva and is presently studying in the United States. She has won many international contests and played in the Youth Orchestra at the famous Carnegie Hall.

EAEU Adapts Regulations toward a Single Customs Code

By Aigerim Seisembayeva

ASTANA – Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states signed a new Customs Code Dec. 26, laying the groundwork for a single EAEU customs code.

The new code will replace regulations adopted in 2009 and was signed following a Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (SEEC) meeting in St. Petersburg attended by the presidents of Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Alexander Lukashenko, the President of Belarus which is the fifth member of the EAEU, did not participate in the meeting.

The new unified code, which is expected to come into force July 1, 2017, took three years to write and seeks to make customs operations more transparent. It will also better facilitate interaction between businesses and government agencies while reducing paperwork and physical contact with officials.

When the new document enters into force, the Eurasian Economic Commission will determine upper cost and weight thresholds for free trade which will be common for all countries. Parties, in their turn, can establish lower rates of duty-free importation on a national level in respect of goods transported by international mail and express carriers.

EAEU members have agreed that one year after the entry into force of the new Customs Code, in 2018, the threshold for the duty-free import of goods from foreign online stores into EAEU countries will be lowered.

President of Kazakhstan Nur-



sultan Nazarbayev, speaking at the meeting, also noted the completion of an electricity market development programme, preparations for a liberalisation plan for the services sector and the launch of the common EAEU financial market. He also said international cooperation has improved under Kazakhstan's EAEU chairmanship in 2016.

"We made good progress in this direction. In October, an agreement on a free trade zone with Vietnam entered into force. We are considering starting negotiations on the establishment of similar zones with Iran, India, Singapore and Egypt. Over 25 memoranda of cooperation and interaction with various countries have been signed. We are aiming at combining the Silk Road Economic Belt with our Union, and searching for common ground with the European Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," Nazarbayev stated.

He also noted that negotiations are being held on trade agreements

with China and Israel and that there is interest in the EAEU from South American states.

Nazarbayev also said the logical step in the development of EAEU international economic relations is a statement on trade policy development, which outlines the principles of cooperation with foreign partners.

"At the same time, we must not forget that the work on trade agreements has to be systematic, most pragmatic and take into account the interests of all members of our Union. It is important to carefully analyse the structure of tariff commitments, the list of possible exemptions with regard to our capabilities and limitations, assessing all risks and new opportunities," Nazarbayev said.

The President of Kazakhstan pointed out a number of factors affecting the work of the EAEU, including the deterioration of global economic conditions and unresolved internal issues of the Union.

"The special role of tackling problems should be given to the Eurasian Economic Commission. Today it is important to look beyond crisis and develop systemic and long-term solutions to build the strategy of the EAEU development. In this connection it is necessary to create an anti-crisis council. If the heads of state support this, I propose to entrust the Commission, together with our governments, to consider this issue and make an appropriate decision," Nazarbayev stated.

In conclusion, the head of state wished Kyrgyzstan's leadership a successful EAEU chairmanship next year.

Nazarbayev also held a bilateral meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and noted the effective cooperation between Kazakhstan and Russia in the framework of the EAEU.

"Our relations are advancing. Questions arise, but we solve them at governmental level. We have discussed the issues of further development of Baikonur and worked out a respective eight-year-long road map," Nazarbayev highlighted.

In turn, Putin praised Kazakhstan for its dedication to the integration process. "The fact that a successful country is actively promoting an integration project has a positive impact on all parties to the EAEU," Putin said.

The bilateral meeting included the signing of agreements increasing cooperation on the Baikonur Cosmodrome complex, the Protocol on Amendments to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the status of the city of Baikonur, the order of

formation and the status of its executive bodies as of 23 December 1995, concerning the list of state bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Kazakh and Russia leaders also issued a statement on the crash of the Russian Defence Ministry's plane near Sochi on Dec. 25 in which 92 people died and Nazarbayev again expressed condolences to the people of Russia.

Nazarbayev also participated in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) Collective Security board meeting with the presidents of Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

"We know how complicated the relations in many regions of the world are. The number of troubled regions is not decreasing," Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the opening of the event.

The group discussed international issues, including terrorism.

Nazarbayev expressed Kazakhstan's intention to further develop military cooperation with the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan's readiness to provide a platform in Astana for talks on the Syrian conflict.

Putin congratulated Nazarbayev on the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence, noting the achievements of the country during this period.

While in St. Petersburg, Nazarbayev, along with Putin, also visited Diakont and Biokad companies. Diakont is one of the only two companies in the world producing radiation-resistant lens zooms and one of the global leaders in developing and producing specialised equipment to ensure security in science intensive industries. The two presidents were shown a compact synchronous motor and other equipment. Biokad is Russia's leading innovative company with full cycle of drug development.

Iran, Kazakhstan to Enhance Cooperation; Ink Agreements on Health, Shipping, Travel, Labour and Trade

By Aigerim Seisembayeva

ASTANA – President of Iran Hassan Rouhani paid an official visit to Kazakhstan on Dec. 22 which saw the signing of several bilateral agreements after his talks with President Nursultan Nazarbayev focusing on investment, trade, economic, transit, transport and agricultural sectors.

During the visit, the two sides signed government to government agreements on cooperation in veterinary medicine and animal health and maritime merchant shipping. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Investment and Development and Iran's Organisation of Applied Arts and Tourism agreed to work on mutual simplification of group tourist trips and Kazakhstan's Ministry of Health and Social Development and Iran's Ministry of Cooperation, Labour and Social Security signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in labour and social security issues. Finally, the National Bank of Kazakhstan and the Central Bank of Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on assistance in the organisation of bilateral trade.

During the talks, Nazarbayev pointed out that numerous high-level meetings testify to the friendly relations between Kazakhstan and



Iran. "I believe that the lifting of economic sanctions against Iran is a result of your efforts," Nazarbayev said.

"Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan's friendly policy toward Iran has remained unchanged. Now is the time for bringing our cooperation to a strategic level and Kazakhstan is ready to work closely together," he said.

Rouhani congratulated the President on Kazakhstan's 25th anniversary of independence, noting that Iran attaches great importance to developing partnership with Kazakhstan. "Our policy has always been aimed at strengthening good

neighbourly relations with all neighbouring countries. Your visit to Iran in April this year was of great importance for the further development of bilateral relations," the Iranian president said.

Nazarbayev stressed that Iran is an important partner and a friendly country for Kazakhstan in the Islamic world. He also noted Iran's large contribution to the process of nuclear disarmament, noting the rapid growth of its economy after the lifting of sanctions, and expressed hope that Iran's current policy will have a positive effect on all Caspian states.

At a joint press conference after

the talks in Akorda, Nazarbayev reported that the two leaders discussed a host of cooperation possibilities as well as the implementation of previous agreements. He focused on projects being implemented in the framework of commercial agreements worth over \$1 billion signed between the two countries. "The work is in process; however, we must make extra effort. We still have a lot of joint projects to come," Nazarbayev said.

He also stressed the "close and trusting relationship" the countries had established. Nazarbayev pointed out Iran's support for Kazakhstan's foreign policy initiatives, as well as Kazakhstan's consistent support for Tehran during the long international negotiations over its nuclear programme. He also emphasised Kazakhstan's role in finding a solution by hosting two rounds of talks on Iran's nuclear programme. Among the promising areas for current bilateral cooperation Nazarbayev pointed out are the mutual unlocking of potential in the transit-transport sector, including cooperation in the railway sector; the establishment of long-term joint ventures in the agricultural sector; and cooperation in the mining and metallurgical industry.

In addition, the Kazakh President

drew attention to new agreements aimed at increasing air traffic, optimising the visa regime and promoting tourism. Nazarbayev also emphasised that he supports Iran's intention to establish a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Nazarbayev stated that during the talks the sides also exchanged views on international and regional issues. "We expressed solidarity in the fight against the spread of Islamophobia and the erroneous identification of Islam with terrorism and jihadism. An agreement was reached to strengthen the political influence of the two countries within the framework of international organisations such as the UN, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation]," he said.

The visit from Rouhani came just days after the foreign ministers of Iran, Russia and Turkey met in Moscow to discuss the efforts to stop the war in Syria welcoming the offer by the Kazakh President to hold fresh talks between the Syrian government and opposition in Astana. Rouhani's visit to the capital also came just a week after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid the first ever visit of the Israeli head of government to Kazakhstan.

Kazakh FM, Uzbek Leaders Discuss Bilateral Cooperation, UNSC Priorities

By Malika Orazgaliyeva And Galiskar Seitzhan

TASHKENT – Minister of Foreign Affairs Erlan Idrissov met with Uzbek President Shaykat Mirziyoyev and Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov in Tashkent on Dec. 23 to discuss bilateral ties and cooperation within the framework of Kazakhstan's election to the 2017-2018 UN Security Council.

According to a Kazakh Foreign Ministry's press release, Mirziyoyev said Tashkent considers Kazakh-

stan's election to the UNSC a success for the entire region and that Uzbekistan is ready to help promote Central Asian's interests within the UNSC, including tackling security challenges coming from Afghanistan.

Mirziyoyev highlighted Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's contributions to global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and the strengthening of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone that was created with the participation of five countries in the region.

In turn, Idrissov noted the im-

portance of reforms initiated by Mirziyoyev for Uzbekistan's socio-economic and political development with particular focus on citizens' needs. Next year in Uzbekistan will be the "Year of dialogue with the people and interests of the people."

"We are impressed by your radical steps to improve the business environment in the country and make it attractive for foreign direct investment," Idrissov stressed.

Idrissov noted the importance of steps taken by Astana and Tashkent to enhance economic cooperation, establish closer ties between Kazakh

and Uzbek entrepreneurs and implement joint projects in trade, industry, agriculture and logistics.

In addition, Idrissov confirmed the invitation of Nazarbayev to Mirziyoyev for a state visit to Astana. Mirziyoyev thanked Nazarbayev for the invitation and said he would visit as soon as possible. Mirziyoyev also underlined the commitment to strengthen fraternal relations with Kazakhstan.

The sides also noted areas of cooperation progress and discussed implementing projects to further cross-border and interregional cooperation.

Idrissov and Kamilov noted that successful bilateral cooperation also lays a foundation for regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Idrissov thanked Kamilov for supporting Kazakhstan's campaign for election to the UNSC and briefed him on Kazakhstan's main priorities.

The parties discussed their interest in long-term stabilisation of Afghanistan and their intention to continue helping that country with infrastructure rebuilding, social and economic development and strengthening its national education system.

Idrissov's visit to Tashkent came as part of his trips in recent weeks to countries in the region, including to Afghanistan and Tajikistan, as Kazakhstan develops its priorities for the two-year UNSC membership and prepares to assume its seat there on Jan. 1, 2017.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

More Than 10,000 Cars Produced in 2016

By Kseniya Voronina

ASTANA – More than 10,000 vehicles valued at 61.5 billion tenge (US\$185 million) were produced in Kazakhstan during the first 11 months of 2016. The government aims to achieve 50-percent localisation in vehicle production and increase the export of Kazakh cars to 40 percent of total production volume by 2018.

“Technically, Kazakhstan’s car industry is completing the year with negative results, but in the segment of trucks recession has been replaced by growth. The share of cars which were made in the state amounted to one-third of the market. Demand for products made by domestic enterprises is recovering much more actively than the sales of imported cars,” said KazAvtoProm Chairperson Oleg Alferov.

Specifically, 10,125 vehicles were produced in the country during the time period, 22 percent less than 2015. Of the total, 8,157 units were passenger cars, 24.5 percent less than the last year. Truck production grew by 8 percent, reaching 1,431 units. Bus production decreased by 10.8 percent to 174 units, according to the KazAvtoProm report and Kazakhstan Automakers’ Union.

“Such results were achieved due to the state programme of soft loans in the amount of 31 billion tenge (US\$93.2 million). Tax revenues from the auto industry exceeded 17 billion tenge (US\$51.1



million). Changes in the tariff regime in the beginning of the year contributed to a significant increase of car models produced in the country. Such new model range will become an important factor in the further revitalisation of the industry,” said Alferov.

A sharp decline in market activity was observed in 2016, as authorised dealers sold only 38,800 units compared to 88,400 in 2015, a 56-percent reduction. The preliminary results of the second half of this year, however, show a rapid recovery in the industry. The decline in production slowed from 56 percent in January-June to 22 percent for the 11-month period. The ASIA AVTO plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk achieved good results in July-November, producing 2,369 cars, or 44 percent more than last year.

SaryarkaAvtoProm launched production of JAC cars from China. Approximately 28 million euro (US\$29.2 million) was invested for further development, of which 18 million euro (US\$18.8 million) was provided by the Chinese investor. The strategic goal of the Kazakh-Chinese partnership is to gain access to the EAEU market. The planned production capacity of the JAC plant is 10,000 units per year. The company plans to export its own products to Russia and expects to deliver the first batch in 2017.

The ASIA AVTO plant launched production of new LADA models, including the Vesta sedan, XRay, Largus and Granta liftback. Assembly of all models corresponds to the quality standards of the Renault-Nissan-AvtoVAZ alliance.

New Recycling Plant to Be Launched in 2017

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – Kazakhstan’s first recycling plant running on green energy will be launched in 2017, according to Kapital.kz. The plant will be located in the Akmola region, not far from the capital.

The investor and project contractor is the German company Eggersmann Anlagenbau GmbH, which has built around 800 recycling plants throughout the world.

The complex will occupy about 11 hectares and be capable of recycling up to 60,000 tonnes of waste per year, according to strategy2050.kz. The project is being implemented at the expense of foreign investors, with the assistance of ECONEP, a Kazakh-German enterprise. The investment amount is approximately 10 million euros (US\$10.4 million).

In previous decades, Kazakhstan accumulated significant amounts of industrial waste, as well as waste from agro-industrial complexes and housing and communal services, according to the source. The total amount of municipal solid waste is about 100 million tonnes, with an additional five-six million tonnes of solid waste forming every year. Only up to 1.8 percent is being recycled, with the rest placed in special landfills. The project will demonstrate an effective waste management model that can be replicated in other regions of the country and help to improve the nation’s ecological state.

Starting in 2019, Kazakhstan will prohibit ejecting waste into landfills without prior processing of food waste, tires, oil, batteries, electrical equipment and plastic, according to Atameken Business Channel. As a result, plans to introduce separate waste collection in cities will begin in 2017.

The new recycling complex will consist of a biogas unit, a site for composting and processing biological waste, and a sorting line. The company will operate in semi-automatic mode, with two shifts each with 20 employees.

The recycling plant will be finished around the middle of next year and be part of Arnasai village, which was built based on green technologies, according to Coalition for a Green Economy and Development of G-Global chairperson Saltanat Rakhimbekova.

The village has wind power, while separate collection of waste was introduced and the local school switched to energy-saving technologies, leading to annual savings of up to 3 million tenge (US\$9,000) for heating and electricity.

“Today, Kazakhstan has developed 35 live green technologies. Those technologies are to save water, to improve energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, especially for growing organic crops, for waste management and ecosystem management and pollution reduction. The country already has projects such as a 300-square-metre solar bio-greenhouse while underground solar panels also work,” said Rakhimbekova.

ECONOMY NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan has increased the share of non-primary goods in total exports to 35 percent, khabar.kz reports. Small business was the main driver of the national economy last year with revenues increasing almost 50 percent. By year’s end, more than 125,000 small businesses were operating in Kazakhstan. The number of new facilities rose 21 percent over the past year. Revenues in the sector increased 50 percent. The business sector is greatly supported by the government through the Damu Entrepreneurship Development Fund that is subsidising loans rates. Over the past six years, more than 8,000 projects received loans worth almost 2 trillion tenge (US\$5.99 billion).

Astana’s economy is growing at fast pace, khabar.kz reports. Over 11 months in 2016, industrial enterprises produced goods worth 368.2 billion tenge (US\$1.1 billion) with a gain of 2.1 percent. The city’s economy received 712.9 billion tenge (US\$2.14 billion) in investments, 1.5 percent more compared to 2015, according to Aizhan Tugelbayeva, deputy head of Economy and Budget Planning Department. In terms of gross regional product, Astana takes second place following the Atyrau region. According to Tugelbayeva, 17,300 new jobs were created between January and November last year, decreasing the overall unemployment rate to 4.6 percent at the end of third quarter 2016.

Renewable electric energy and energy efficiency is a priority market for the innovation system of Kazakhstan, according to ranking. Each year, the volume of commissioned facilities for renewable energy is growing at 25 percent. This market involves more than 50 companies. In late October, the International Energy Agency was optimistic about the renewable energy market. The agency improved its growth forecast in the sector compared to the previous expectations. By 2021, solar and wind energies are expected to witness cost reductions of 21 and 15 percent, respectively. The input of electrical power at renewable energy sources keeps growing every year in Kazakhstan. In 2015, the volume of investments aimed at the development of a green economy amounted to 9.3 billion tenge (US\$27.87 million), which is five times more than in 2014.

According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Kazakhstan’s GDP growth will reach 2.4 percent in 2017, 365info.kz reports. Doctor of Economic Sciences Tursunbek Omurzakov commented that according to the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy, the volume of GDP amounted to 31.3 trillion tenge (US\$93.8 billion) over the first nine months of 2016, increasing 0.4 percent. Thus, the government’s forecast seems to be more close to reality. On the other hand, according to the ministry’s forecast for 2017-2019, the world oil price stands at \$35 per barrel, with a further increase to \$40 per barrel in 2020 and \$45 per barrel in 2021. However, the current price of Brent crude oil is \$57. Apparently, the EBRD experts believe that Kazakhstan has passed the economic downturn and inflation peak. Therefore, its outlook is more optimistic, said Omurzakov.

The National Bank of Kazakhstan reported on the extension of the period of dual circulation of banknotes in denominations of 1,000 tenge (US\$3) of 2006 and 2014 samples until March 1, kazinform.kz reports. According to the bank, prior to this date banknotes will be eligible for payments and banking transactions in Kazakhstan without any restrictions. Banknotes can be exchanged in all branches of the National Bank. From March 1 to Feb. 28, 2018, these banknotes can be exchanged at any second tier bank. As reported, all branches of the National Bank will exchange these banknotes until Feb. 28, 2021 and without a commission. At the same time, the National Bank informs that there are also legal tender commemorative banknotes in denomination of 1,000 tenge in circulation.

Kazakhstan’s Economy Adapts to New Exchange Rates, National Bank Says

Staff Report

Kazakhstan’s economy has adapted to new exchange rate conditions, said National Bank Chairperson Daniyar Akishev Dec. 20 at a governmental meeting.

The annual inflation rate fell to a single-digit value. Akishev cited data on inflation, according to which by the end of November, inflation was at 1.2 percent and, since the beginning of the year, 7.5 percent.

“At a time when changes in the exchange rate in August last year were 78 percent as of Dec. 15 this year and annual inflation declined to 8.7 percent; we may assume that the process of transfer of the effect of corrections on the domestic prices is almost complete. An adaptation of the domestic economy was performed accordingly with the exchange rate conditions,” said Akishev.



Daniyar Akishev

According to him, in the next two months, inflation will reach the established range of 6-8 percent and will be within that range throughout 2017.

During the meeting, which summed up the past 11 months, Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev noted the need to keep inflation within a range of 6-8 percent.

Bad Weather, Highway Closures Cause Rail Travel Spike During New Year’s Holiday

By Aigerim Seisembayeva

ASTANA – Bad weather and the closure of major highways during the peak New Year’s holiday caused a surge in rail travel.

More than a million passengers were carried on the nation’s railway systems during the New Year holidays, including 100,000 passengers traveling from Astana. Six additional passenger trains were put into service and more than 500 additional cars were added to passenger trains. In the northern region, 70-80 cars were added.

The increased rail travel followed bad weather conditions which caused squally wind, icy roads and almost zero visibility due to snowstorms. The Astana-Kokshetau, Astana-Karagandy highways were closed.

Among the holiday rail travelers were Arailym Askarbekova,

her husband and two-year-old son who were traveling from Kostanai to Taraz to visit relatives. However, Askarbekova went into labour as the train pulled into the Astana station. The train’s conductor and staff immediately called for assistance. Medical personnel arrived and Askarbekova successfully gave birth en route to a local perinatal centre.

In 2016, more than 20 million passengers travelled by train in Kazakhstan. National rail carrier Kazakhstan Temir Zholy trains its staff in communication ethics, speech culture, standards of service and the ability to manage emergency situations, including first aid.

In other Kazakh railway news, a subsidiary of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, KTZ Express, recently launched the first refrigerator container train on the Herne (Germany) – Lanzhou (China) route jointly with RTSB GmbH, Be-

lintertrans-Germany GmbH and Euro-BRICS.

The train consists of 40 refrigerator containers with perishable products. Elite wine producers from France were the first customers. The train left the city of Herne Dec. 27 and arrived at the Ilets station in Uralsk, Kazakhstan, Jan. 5.

This cargo route normally requires 45 days by sea. The use of rail is expected to cut that travel time and boost the volume of transportation of goods requiring special temperature conditions. This is expected to increase transit traffic from China to Europe through Kazakhstan.

KTZ Express operates its own fleet of specialised containers with a climate regime ranging from -25°C to +25°C. The fleet comprises 430 units and offers all-season services of delivery of cargos requiring special temperature conditions around the world.

Vice Minister of Agriculture: Farmers Collect Nearly 24 Million Tonnes of Grain

Staff Report

ASTANA – The gross grain harvest in Kazakhstan this year was 23.7 million tonnes, almost 4 million tonnes more than last year’s yield. Kazakh farmers have also harvested 3.6 million tonnes of vegetables and 2.2 million tonnes of melons, exceeding last year’s produce yield by 511,000 tonnes.

First Vice Minister of Agriculture Kairat Aituganov reported on the results and progress of the country’s agro-industrial complex development at a Dec. 20 government session on social and economic growth in Astana.



Kairat Aituganov

“The average yield totalled 1.54 tonnes per hectare, which is 15 percent more than last year [1.34 tonnes per hectare]. The collected

harvest fully covers domestic demand and meets the export targets at the level of 8.5-9 million tonnes. At present, grain exports amount to 7.9 million tonnes, which exceeds the previous year’s figure by 12 percent,” he said.

“In 11 months, the agricultural gross output grew to reach 3.4 trillion tenge; the index of physical volume grew by 4.5 percent compared to the same period last year,” the vice minister said.

The livestock industry has seen an increase of herd size by on average 1.3 percent, meat production growth of 3.5 percent and a milk production increase of 3.1 percent.

For the first time in the past 20 years, farmers sowed sugar beet in northern Kazakhstan. Total production was 14,000 tonnes with an average yield of 350 kilogrammes per hectare. This is higher than the average national indicator by 15 percent.

“Overall, this year we had a good harvest,” Aituganov concluded.

The country is set to boost its agricultural output and food production. The State Programme of Agrarian and Industrial Complex Development for 2015-2017 sets a goal of increasing livestock production by 40 percent and crop production by 30 percent.

The programme also ensures that farmers receive enough financial incentive to improve efficiency. Under the programme, the number of farmers receiving state financial support will grow sevenfold, from 67,000 to 500,000.

By 2021, gross output of agricultural products is expected to grow by 30 percent or 1 trillion tenge (US\$3 billion) to reach 4.3 trillion tenge (\$12.9 billion). More than 1,200 farming co-operatives will be involved in the food products distribution system.

The increase in new indicators will be achieved under the previously approved budget, without additional funding.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudi Arabia's Metals Corners Holding Co. will invest \$50 million in projects for the search, exploration and development of deposits of nonferrous and precious metals (gold, copper, lead, zinc and silver) in Kazakhstan, according to Interfax Kazakhstan citing Kazgeologiya, the national geological exploration company. "At this time, the areas of the East Kazakhstan and the Karaganda regions were presented to Metals Corners Holding Co. The company plans to send its geologists at the end of January 2017 to explore the area and calculate the search operations budget," said the representative. The corresponding agreement was signed in October.

Zhaltyrbylak has launched a new enterprise for heap leaching and processing gold ore from the deposit with the same name in the Karaganda region, reported Interfax-Kazakhstan on Dec. 23. "As a result of the gold ore processing there are plans to get a special alloy, which is an ingot obtained from the ore that went through a hydrometallurgical process and 75 percent of it is gold. The exclusive purchaser of the final product is the National Bank of Kazakhstan," noted the statement. The total cost of the project is 3.4 billion tenge (US\$10.1 million), more than half of which is company's own funds. The design capacity of the enterprise is more than 500,000 tonnes of processed ore per year. The planned annual sales turnover is about 2 billion tenge (US\$5.9 million).

Alatau Capital Invest (ACI) has acquired a 3.4-percent stake in national telecom operator Kazakhtelecom, according to the company's press service. As part of the strategy of diversifying its investment portfolio, ACI purchased 413,316 shares of Kazakhtelecom in a transaction totalling 5.8 billion tenge (US\$17.4 million). ACI was founded in 2016 by Kazakh businessperson Kairat Satybaldyuly, who also owns a 30-percent stake of Kaspi Holding. In April, ACI signed a memorandum with AllurGroup on attracting investment and strategic partnership to develop the Kazakh national automobile cluster in Kostanai.

Baiterek National Holding opened a credit line for KazAzot for a period up to 36 months for export through the Kazakhstan Development Bank. The deal is worth 6 billion tenge (US\$17.9 million), according to forbes.kz. The given resources are expected to be spent to purchase energy resources and raw materials (ammonia, concentrated nitric acid and sulphur) and the subsequent production and export of granulated ammonium nitrate and liquid ammonia used in agriculture and mining, said the source. The contracts for export were concluded with major traders and agricultural companies in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. "Concessional financing will allow us to ensure product sales on external markets as well, despite the impact of external factors, and to increase the volume of exports of ammonium nitrate and liquid ammonia," said KazAzot Director General Kinis Urakov. The company plans to produce up to 313,000 tonnes in 2017, 40 percent of which will be exported, the balance for the domestic market.

Forbes Kazakhstan and KPMG have ranked Kazakh insurance companies according to the amount of premiums they collected in 2015. The ranking excludes life insurance companies. The 26 participants in the ranking accumulated 208.5 billion tenge (US\$627.4 million), which is 9 percent more than in the previous year. Most of the money came from property insurance (26 percent), driver responsibility insurance (17 percent) and employee accident insurance (13 percent). Evraziya (Eurasia) Insurance Company occupies 17.6 percent of the market and accumulated 36.7 billion tenge (US\$110.4 million). It was followed by Halyk-Kazakhstrakh, which collected nearly 28.9 billion tenge (US\$86.9 million). Third place belongs to Kazakhmys Insurance Company with 17.2 billion tenge (US\$51.7 million). The top five also include Nomad Insurance and Kaspi Strakhovanie. All the data used for the ranking was assessed according to National Bank financial statements or statistical data.

Construction, Education, Energy Are Areas Attracting Foreigners to Kazakhstan

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Kazakhstan's continued efforts to attract foreign investment have spurred an influx of foreign talent and professionals from various fields. Certain factors did influence the outflow in recent years, such as the devaluation of the national currency, but upcoming events like EXPO 2017, construction of the Abu Dhabi Plaza in the capital and holding the Universiade in Almaty still attract the foreign workforce.

The Astana Times tried to determine what jobs are in the most demand in the foreign community and why these positions look attractive.

Nina Bychenko, director general of Head Hunters (hh.kz), the country's top head hunting and recruiting agency, noted the largest number of candidates is present in professional fields such as top management. The majority of applicants are age 30-40, with men completely dominating at 82 percent.

"Speaking of their specialisations, usually they're in such fields as professional management and administration, production and technology and crisis management. As for their [ex-patriot labourers] demand and their competitiveness with the locals, here, perhaps the key is the effectiveness of key performance indicators (KPI) of employees, regardless of location," she said.

Bychenko provided the statistics her agency compiled in the past six months. According to the data, 24 percent of the employed staff are in top management positions, 15 percent in IT and telecommunications, 13 percent in both the sales and manufacturing sectors, 11 percent in construction and 24 percent in other fields.

In addition to figures and digits, however, The Astana Times wanted to hear the opinions of local expats about the promising fields with a positive outlook in the future.

"If you had asked me five years ago what was the most common occupation of expats in Kazakhstan, I would have said oil and natural resources and to a certain extent that is true, but more recently other sectors have risen up the scale," said trainer and event manager Gareth Stamp.

He noted he has encountered a lot

of people in the construction industry.

"In Astana alone, projects such as EXPO, Abu Dhabi Plaza, the Talan Towers and recently the St. Regis Hotel – all rely heavily on a foreign workforce. In other parts of the country such as Shymkent, the number of expats has risen in construction, too," he added.

The other area of growth in numbers has been in education, said Stamp.

"Nazarbayev University and the two Haileybury Schools [in Astana and Almaty] are almost all expat specialist lecturers and teachers – indeed this is the selling point for these establishments. Other universities and schools have also realised the value in having native speakers working with them. The Nazarbayev intellectual group of schools across the country still employs large numbers of foreign teachers and trainers," he said.

He also highlighted the two fields that will see more growth in the future.

"One area that I see future increase in the use of expats will be in vocational education, helping to develop the manufacturing base of the country and improve the economic viability in this area. The other area is tourism and recreation. Small and medium-sized companies are being established to develop regional tourism. This may not bring in vast numbers of expats, but those that do come will be more valuable, giving more back to the areas that they live in," he said.

Another ex-patriot from Portugal, country manager architect Susana Ramalho, confirmed Stamp's estimates that the construction sector attracts foreign workers.

"Astana is in great development. The people with whom I usually meet, not only professionally but also among friends, are mainly from the construction sphere: mainly architects, engineers and designers. There are also a considerable amount of people related to education: English teachers and university professors in a variety of disciplines. And of course, it is very frequent to find people from embassies – diplomats and/or collaborators, among my entourage of foreign friends. I believe that one of the most popular professions for expats in Kazakhstan is engineer – certainly in the sector of construc-

tion like civil engineer, mechanical engineer and so on," she said.

"I encountered a lot of engineers working in the oil and gas field," said Kazakh TV presenter and KazakhMys assistant to the smelting general director Chris Stanton. "But I also came across many geologists and construction workers conducting large scale projects across the country."

Stanton believes the most promising sectors in Kazakhstan are natural minerals and transportation.

"Kazakhstan is one of world's largest landlocked countries, which makes it hard to transport goods at a cost-effective rate," said Stanton. "But we can see, on the other hand, India has access to the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and the Aden Sea as well as a handful of vital ports all the way to Australia and Singapore. Now Kazakhstan, through the Asian Development Fund, attracted \$140 billion worth of agreements and loans as well as the Ministry of Investment and Development [overseeing transport] of Kazakhstan has promised to invest over \$20 billion in the transport industry by 2020. That initiative is called the 'New Silk Road' and its main aim is to use energy, transport, trade, communications and infrastructure investment to economically integrate the regions' full potential. And finally to create a stronger bond and more economically-efficient link between Central Asia, Russia, China and the European countries, to name a few, via the Western Europe-Western China expressway."

"Also if we take into account that this project will help reduce costs of transportation services and cut down the time it takes for the overall transportation of Kazakh natural minerals, we can clearly see where the industry will be pivoting towards and what is on the horizon. Now that this initiative is already in motion, I feel that Kazakhstan will start to invest more into geological exploration of unknown and uncharted territories where they know there is a promise of efficient transport. Natural minerals are, of course, the backbone of any country and Kazakhstan, through this project, will increase their overall GDP and shipping their minerals faster to markets that are in demand of local products," he said.

Experts Say Qazkom too Big to Fail

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Experts consider the situation with Qazkom shows the complex situation in the Kazakh financial field, but predict the bank is stable and too important a financial institution for the state and won't have really serious problems.

"Qazkom has already been promised that it will get support at the highest level. This is a signal to creditors that they don't need to worry. The bank has a significant loan portfolio in foreign currency and in tenge," said economist Sayan Kombarov, according to forbes.kz.

The state does not give a negative scenario and doesn't even want to think about Qazkom's falling, added economist Zharas Akhmetov.

"And what if there is no other way out? It is too big to allow it to fail," he said.

"I think that bank lending and the financial system led by the National Bank, as well as the monetary and economic policy led by the government, slow down long-term sustainable development of the country," said Kombarov.

"Banking and foreign loans, which are attracted to private and quasi-public sectors, do not lead to an increase in productivity and responsible and profitable investment," he added.

Kombarov noted in the case of Qazkom's collapse, the Kazakh market would have had serious problems and fall in depositors' confidence.

"Banks with partial redundancy can never return all deposits at the same time. In this case, other banks may fall. In this case, depositors can lose their money or National Bank will have to assist other banks at the expense of emissions that can lead to depreciation of the tenge, reducing the borrowing ratings of second tier banks," he added.

Kombarov is a strong supporter of the idea that private or public banks or businesses generating losses should not be maintained at the expense of the state and taxpayers.

"Loss-making and unprofitable enterprises and their managements do not bear any responsibility for society. Instead of this, they get more help at the expense of budget funds and taxpayers. Foreign creditors are willing to lend under the state guarantees, which brings losses on the shoul-



Timur Turlov

ders of the productive and responsible savers who are forced to bear the burden of the worsening economic and social situation. Savings are used for the support of unproductive and parasitic structures," he said.

He does not see an optimal solution in the situation with Qazkom.

"Management of the bank and financial regulators are responsible for the fact that problems weren't solved in time. A default of unprofitable enterprises would be the best solution that enables to clean rottenness from the financial system, as long as it does not spread. It is necessary to organise the market correction, sale of illiquid assets at market price and debt restructuring. After the market correction and the definition of actual prices for assets, the growth is possible," said Kombarov.

Freedom Finance Director Timur Turlov noted the process of restructuring bank debts will be continued this year, reported kursiv.kz. He added an alliance of Qazkom and Halyk Bank, rumoured late last year, is still possible.

National Bank provided a 400.8 billion tenge (US\$1.22 billion) loan for Qazkom on Dec. 14. A partial repayment of 200 billion tenge (US\$600 million) was made Dec. 26.

Bloomberg reported earlier that the salvation of Qazkom may cost 1.5 trillion tenge (\$4.5 billion). The bank rescue is one of the alternatives being discussed by representatives of Qazkom and National Bank. The problem could become the largest since the global financial crisis, which occurred seven years ago when the state provided \$20 billion to restructure the debt of Kazakhstan domestic banks.

With Any Oil Price Scenario, Kashagan Benefits Country's Economy, Says Expert

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – The launch of production in 2016 of the Kashagan oil field will be of great benefit to the Kazakh economy despite current oil prices, General Director of the Association of oil service companies of Kazakhstan (KazService) Nurlan Zhumagulov told The Astana Times.

"Kashagan is not only the largest oil and gas field discovered in the last 50 years, but also one of the most difficult to develop, due to the high concentration of hydrogen sulphide, a huge reservoir pressure and a closed body of water of the Caspian Sea. According to the Ministry of Energy with the commencement of the North Caspian Sea Production Sharing Agreement, the state budget has received bonuses in the amount of \$1.9 billion. And until the expiry of that agreement in 2041, it is forecasted that Kashagan will bring \$25-\$77 billion a year in tax revenues and royalties to the state budget, depending on world oil prices. Clearly, the higher the price of oil, the more quickly the cost of development of the Kashagan field will pay off and the state will increase its share of the profits," Zhumagulov said.

He also mentioned dozens of

thousands of citizens of Kazakhstan and hundreds of Kazakh oil service companies that are involved in the Kashagan project.

"In addition, the operator of the Kashagan field invests annually (1 percent of the investment) into social and infrastructure projects in the Atyrau and Mangystau regions. At the moment, more than 100 facilities were built and repaired, which cost around \$501 million. With any oil price scenario, Kashagan benefits country's economy," said Zhumagulov.

In December, it was announced that in accordance with the agreement on the reduction of oil production among the countries outside of OPEC, Kazakhstan has agreed to reduce oil production by 20,000 barrels per day for six months.

"Thus, oil production in the whole country will be reduced to a level of 1.68 million barrels per day during the first half of 2017. The reduction will take place at the expense of mature fields mainly in the Kyzylorda and Aktope regions, and will not affect major projects such as Kashagan, Tengiz and Karachaganak. In the second half of 2017 it is expected to increase production at the expense of the Kashagan field, which by the end of 2017 should reach full capacity

within Phase 1 to 370,000 barrels per day," stated Zhumagulov.

Two other Kazakh major fields, Tengiz and Karachaganak, are also progressing.

According to Zhumagulov, "currently the attention of many local and foreign companies is focused on the Future Growth Project and Wellhead Pressure Management Project (FGP-WPMP) of Tengiz because in July 2016 it was decided to implement those projects amounting to \$36.8 billion. It is expected that the production at Tengiz will increase by 50 percent from 26 to 38 million tonnes of oil per year. At the peak of construction in 2018-

2021, FGP-WPMP will provide around 20,000 new jobs."

Meanwhile, the Karachaganak project also expects expansion in the production in 2018. Now there is a tender for pre-draft design, says Zhumagulov. The investment will amount to at least \$7 billion.

"Tengiz, Karachaganak and Kashagan are the projects that will ensure not only stable production of hydrocarbons, but also the activation of the oilfield services business over the next decade," said expert.

Zhumagulov heads the Association of Oil service Companies of Kazakhstan, which is a public association assisting the development

of domestic oil service industry. KazService mediates contractors and oil companies, as well as helps create joint ventures/consortiums between foreign and Kazakh companies to carry out oil and gas capital-intensive projects.

"New companies come to the Kazakh market who are in dire need of local partners. And they often address us because we provide consolidated information on procurement of subsoil users," he added.

A special role in the activities of the association is the interaction with government agencies on policy development of local content in the oil and gas market.



EDITORIAL & OPINION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

After Ups and Downs of 2016, Kazakhstan Ready and Optimistic for 2017

The year 2016 will go down as one of the most unpredictable and volatile years in recent history. The election of Donald Trump – which few anticipated – as well as the unexpected outcome of the UK's referendum on its EU membership, have surprised everyone. On a global scale, the world has faced many challenges. There was the outbreak of the Zika virus in South America before the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Terrorism has continued to plague the whole world, while conflicts in the Middle East continue to cause suffering and destruction. The global economy has remained volatile.

Kazakhstan has not been immune from some of these global challenges. Economic growth slowed due to the recent falls in oil prices. Some budget cuts had to be made to take into account the new economic reality. Kazakhstan's Energy Minister Kanat Bozumbayev recently announced that the country will be looking to reduce oil production by 20,000 barrels, following the recent meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers in Vienna. The drop in oil prices have in part been mitigated by steps taken by the government to diversify the nation's economy by putting forward measures and initiatives that help attract foreign investment and encourage growth in the numbers of small and medium sized businesses. The diversification of the Kazakh economy will not happen overnight, but tangible progress is being made. It is also worth noting that despite the obvious economic challenges, Kazakhstan is still an area of stability in Central Asia and remains the most attractive destination in the region for investment.

However, this year, Kazakhstan has unfortunately been the target of terrorists and extremists too. In June, an attack took place in Aktobe, killing seven people, while in July five people lost their lives in Almaty. The recent atrocity at the Christmas market in Berlin reminds us how terrorism continues to affect all corners of the world. This is why it is absolutely imperative that the international community follows the proposal voiced by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev at the UN General Assembly's 70th session in 2015 to establish a global coalition network to fight terrorism and violent extremism.

Kazakhstan also faced social challenges in 2016, primarily public protests regarding proposed land reforms. It was a divisive issue, but the government's swift decision to listen and engage with the people turned out to be the right path to take and demonstrated the willingness of the government to take into account the people's and civil society's concerns. The peaceful manner in which the issue was resolved demonstrated the maturity of our nation. It now makes sense to wait for better conditions before restarting the process of discussions of these market economy-driven land reforms.

While noting the challenges faced by Kazakhstan in 2016, we must also remember the achievements of the past 12 months. Kazakhstan, of course, celebrated its 25th year as an independent nation. During this momentous year, Kazakhstan was elected to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member for 2017-2018, the first country from Central Asia to be given this honour and responsibility. Indeed, Kazakhstan has demonstrated why it deserves a seat on the UNSC. President Nazarbayev's leadership has been credited with mending the relations between Russia and Turkey. Kazakhstan's role as a mediator may be utilised again after Russia, Turkey and Iran agreed that negotiations between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition should take place and after the Kazakh President confirmed readiness to host them in Astana. So, the Syrian crisis is likely to be one of a number of challenges that will need to be resolved in 2017.

However, there is also plenty to look forward to next year. Astana will welcome visitors to EXPO 2017 between June and September. Following this global event, the EXPO site will be used for the Astana International Finance Centre. Meanwhile, Almaty will host the 28th Winter Universiade Games from Jan. 29 to Feb. 8.

There is no denying that 2016 has seen its ups and downs, but Kazakhstan as a nation must continue to look forward. Despite all the challenges, Kazakhstan has enough reasons to be optimistic about 2017 and be prepared to embrace all the opportunities it may bring.

Kazakhstan to Seek Unity during Tenure on UNSC

The last 12 months will rank among the most turbulent of recent times. We have seen major political shocks driven by widespread public anger and frustration at the political and business elite in the U.S. and Europe. Mainstream parties and ideas are under challenge everywhere.

The tragedy of Syria and Iraq has deepened, fuelled by violent extremism, which continues to cause death and destruction across the world. These conflicts are also a prime cause of the refugee crisis. Millions have fled the fighting to seek a safer, better life for their families. But the mass movement of people has added to tensions in many countries and put a heavy burden on their neighbours.

At the same time, the global economy remains in a fragile state. Living standards are under pressure across large parts of the world. Trade growth – the motor of prosperity – has stalled and is now expected to be at the lowest level since the financial crisis.

The response to these challenges over the last year should have been increased cooperation to find effective and sustainable solutions. But instead of unity, the international community has rarely seemed as fractured or incapable of action.

It is against this worrying background that Astana takes on a major responsibility on Jan. 1 as Kazakhstan is the first country from Central Asia to sit on the United Nations Security Council. The country is determined, as one might expect from a nation which has made promoting cooperation, dialogue and peace the guiding principles of its foreign relations, to do all it can to help heal divisions and tackle global threats.

This must include concerted action against terrorism. Kazakhstan has already committed to work towards step up efforts to cut off the funds that finance their conflict in Iraq and Syria as well as their terrorist attacks around the world.

The situation in Afghanistan is of particular concern to us and to all countries in the region. It would be the height of folly, not just for neighbouring nations like Kazakhstan but also the wider world, to allow the country, which has suffered too much for almost four decades now, to slip back into the hands of the Taliban and other extremist groups.

Kazakhstan rightfully intends to use its work at the UNSC to press for increased financial and practical support for the elected government of Afghanistan. One must admit that despite the challenges it faces, Afghanistan has made real progress in recent years, which must not be wasted.

At a bilateral level, Kazakhstan already gives on-the-ground help as well as training to hundreds of its brightest students. But the best long-term way to defeat terrorism in Afghanistan is to integrate the country into a strong regional economy. It is why Kazakhstan is investing, along with its partners, in improving transport links across Central Asia to boost trade, employment and prosperity.

Terrorism, however, is a truly global threat. We need, as President Nursultan Nazarbayev has urged, a genuine Global Coalition under the auspices of the UN to ensure we have the resources and information to win this fight.

This will be impossible, however, unless we act to end the tragedy in Syria. It has become clear that there can be no solution without the sitting government's involvement. What's needed now is the courage and vision to find a settlement that allows the moderate opposition to have a strong voice in the country's future so that the violent extremists can be driven out of Syria. That is why Kazakhstan welcomed the Dec. 29 announcement of a ceasefire brokered by Moscow and Ankara and accepted their proposal to host, if needed, intra-Syrian talks on the potential political settlement for the cruelest of the ongoing conflicts.

Reaching it won't be easy. But only through dialogue rather than suspicion and sanctions can trust be rebuilt and lasting and fair solutions found.

These solutions must include a concerted effort to lift the shadow of nuclear weapons from our world – the cause of our time as President Nazarbayev made clear in his Manifesto. That is why, among other issues, it would be important to continue to support the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran and work on that country's re-integration into the international community.

The nuclear agreement with Iran – reached with Kazakhstan's help – was a major step in limiting nuclear proliferation while allowing countries the right to atomic power for peaceful purposes. Our country will be making its own major contribution to this critical goal next year when we host the International Atomic Energy Agency's Low-Enriched Uranium Bank. It is one symbol of global cooperation we must hope will make 2017 a more optimistic year in the global calendar than the last 12 months.

Kazakhstan enters its two-year membership on the UN Security Council not only with a newcomer's enthusiasm but also a sober awareness of the mountain to climb on the way toward making our common world better, even with one small step at a time.

Connecting Minds, Creating the Future

By Zhaina Yerbolat

The World Exhibition EXPO 2020 will be held in Dubai under the theme "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future." Kazakh Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Kairat Lama Sharif shared his opinion on creating the future of Kazakh-Emirati cooperation.



How do you assess the current state of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and the Emirates?

This year, we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and the UAE. Over the years, the Emirates has become a reliable and effective partner for Kazakhstan in the Arab and Muslim world.

Currently, the two countries maintain a quite active and productive political dialogue; they have developed similar approaches to the resolution of global problems and successfully implement big investment economic projects.

The jubilee year begins with the official visit of President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the UAE. At the invitation of the Emirates government, Nazarbayev will take part in the 10th World Future Energy Summit on Jan. 16 in Abu Dhabi.

The sixth joint session of the Kazakh-UAE intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation will take place in the framework of the visit. The sides will sign key documents, including the memorandum of understanding between the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation on the establishment of a joint commission on consular issues. The memorandum of understanding on cooperation in tourism between the Kazakh Ministry of Investment and Development (MID) and the UAE Ministry of Economy, memorandum of understanding between the MID and the UAE Federal Authority for Land and Maritime Transport on international road transport of passengers and cargo, and memorandum of understanding between the Kazakh Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society and the UAE General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments will be signed, too.

In addition, the parties are planning to sign the memorandum of cooperation between the national company Astana EXPO 2017 and Dubai Bureau of EXPO 2020, as well as a memorandum of understanding between Astana International Financial Centre and Dubai International Financial Centre.

These concrete steps will give powerful impetus to further fruitful cooperation between Kazakhstan and the UAE.

Among the Middle East countries, the UAE continues to be a major investor in Kazakhstan. According to the National Bank of Kazakhstan, in the period from 2005-2016 the gross inflow of direct investments from the UAE to Kazakhstan's economy amounted to nearly \$2 billion.

In addition, the UAE allocated more than \$100 million on a pro bono basis to Kazakhstan for the construction of social facilities. A clear example of friendly relations is the Kazakh-Emirati Secondary School, built in Astana this year with the grant from the Charitable Foundation of the UAE President.

Thus, today we can confidently say that relations between the two countries have successfully passed the stage of formation and now have reached a completely new, effective level of development in many spheres of their multi-faceted cooperation.

What specific steps are being taken for the development of a

strategic partnership between Astana and Abu Dhabi?

It is worth noting that the "strategic partnership," as the term of interstate relations, suggests the presence of a number of conditions. First of all, partner countries should have fundamentally important strategic objectives, the achievement of which is impossible in the ordinary type of cooperation and can be achieved only by moving their bilateral relations to a higher quality level of partnership. Here, it concerns very important indicators in the priority areas such as trade and economy, investments, science and technology, as well as the cultural and humanitarian field.

If we talk about specific promising areas of trade and economic cooperation, it, first of all, comes to Kazakhstan's export of agricultural products to the UAE. Emirati investors and partners have been paying special attention lately to the agricultural industry of Kazakhstan, which, in their opinion, could be the anchor for other areas of bilateral, mutually-beneficial cooperation.

The Emirates strongly supported the initiative of President Nazarbayev to establish the Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS) with headquarters in Astana.

In April 2016, a delegation of the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment participated in the inaugural session of the IOFS General Assembly.

The new agency of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will coordinate the efforts of the member states of the organisation in the field of agriculture and food security, develop strategies and programmes on agriculture development and provide technical assistance to the states in need, as well as take practical measures to combat hunger.

Establishment of the IOFS is a qualitatively new step in the economic cooperation between the OIC member states. Previously, they interacted in this area without a single coordinating body and development strategy and with low efficiency and fragmentation of joint actions.

In general, I want to emphasise that the activities of the IOFS in Astana will support Kazakhstan's standing in the Muslim world, as well as strengthen the position of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a leading exporter of food to the OIC markets.

In this regard, it should be noted that the rapid economic development of the UAE over the past 20 years has led to a sharp increase of its population: from 2.3 million people in 1995 to 8.6 million in 2015.

The Emirates imports about 85 percent of the food present in the local market. In general, in the region this figure reaches 90 percent.

According to the Customs Services of the United Arab Emirates, last year the country imported food products worth more than \$11.7 billion. However, foreign companies producing or selling food frequently choose the Emirates as the starting point, where their cargoes are distributed to other regions of the world.

Currently, with the assistance of the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Abu Dhabi, Kazakh agro-industrial companies are considering supplying different types of food to the UAE, establishing direct contacts with potential buyers from the Emirates, exchanging information on quality

and prices of products and discussing details of export contracts.

Furthermore, against the background of the active development of space activities in the Emirates in recent years, there are good prospects for expanding mutually beneficial cooperation in peaceful outer space exploration.

The UAE has adopted a programme for the development of its space industry and created the Federal Space Agency and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Dubai Space Centre. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the UAE, the Emirates plans to launch an artificial satellite to Mars in 2021.

Taking into account that Kazakhstan is among the 30 countries possessing space technology and in the top 10 in terms of high definition technology, we could jointly and successfully implement the ambitious plans of the Emirates.

To assess the state and prospects of further bilateral cooperation, in May 2016 a delegation of the UAE Federal Space Agency headed by Chairman Khalifa Al Rumaithi visited Kazakhstan. They discussed cooperation between the space agencies of the two countries in such areas as space research, remote sensing of the Earth, global satellite navigation, the use of space infrastructure, the creation of space vehicles and their parts and the provision and use of launch services.

During the visit, the Aerospace Committee of the Ministry for Investment and Development of Kazakhstan and the UAE Space Agency signed a memorandum of understanding in the field of exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. Thus, they established a legal framework for expanding bilateral cooperation in astronautics.

The next important step in the Kazakh-Emirati partnership could be the establishment of cooperation in nuclear energy. In recent years, the UAE has paid special attention to the development of green energy, or alternative and renewable energy sources, including nuclear.

Given the high rate of socio-economic development of the Emirates, every year electricity consumption in the country grows. Since 2008, the UAE government has conducted a number of studies on energy demand and electricity generation. The results show that by 2020 the demand for electricity will amount to almost 40,000 MW (40 GW); i.e. demand will increase annually by an average of 9 percent.

In this regard, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC) was created in 2009 with initial charter capital of \$100 million.

In 2011, the South Korean corporation KEPSCO won a tender for the construction of four power units of the Barakah nuclear power plant in the UAE as a general contractor and main project operator for 60 years. The construction of the four power units, according to various sources, costs from \$30 billion to \$40 billion.

In accordance with the construction plan, the first unit of the nuclear power plant is to be commissioned this year, and it is planned to put into operation one reactor annually; thus by 2020, the project will be completed. After the launch of the four reactors of the Barakah nuclear power plant, its energy generation will amount to 5,600 MW, which will cover 25 percent of the electricity needs in the country and will help to prevent the emission of harmful gases in amount of about 12 million tonnes per year.

The fact that Kazakhstan ranks first in the world in uranium production provides the Kazatomprom national company competitive opportunities to conclude a long-term contract to supply uranium to the Barakah nuclear power plant.

The full version of the interview is available online.

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Kazakhstan Reforms Minerals Legislation amid Efforts to Attract Investment

By Lyazzat Shatayeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan is developing new approaches to assessing and reporting mineral resources and reserves to ensure transparency, efficiency and new investments in the commodities sector.

The large-scale reform was initiated in 2013, involving a variety of stakeholders and government agencies in the discussion. The new legislation will create a framework aimed at boosting mineral exploration, establishing effective control over environmental protection and providing incentives for investors.

A team of lawyers from Olympex Advisers and White & Case is helping the Ministry of Investment and Development with the advance work for the reform. The draft code will be submitted to the government for review in July 2017 and Parliament in September 2017.

Timur Odilov, an associate at White & Case, is one of the lawyers involved in developing the code. As the draft approaches completion, Odilov spoke with The Astana Times about the main changes proposed in the minerals sector.



Timur Odilov

explored during the Soviet times and the early 1990s. So, the main mission of the law was to ensure procedures for granting mineral titles in regards to the known deposits. However, all of the explored deposits have been developed. There is a need to strengthen exploration. The general tendency globally is that exploration is done by private companies, not the governments. There is a need to build a framework within which private companies can easily invest in exploration works. This entails conceptual reforms," he said.

He noted the current law is "overly prescriptive."

"It implies the government's direct involvement in the process, especially in aspects related to assessment of the profitability of the mineral deposits. The governments of the majority of countries with proven records of effective mining practices, like Canada and Australia, are not engaged in these processes. The economic assessment of the mineral deposits should fall under the sole decision of a subsoil user. The government will retain control in securing industrial safety and environmental

protection. The government's role is of a regulator, not a warden. This regulatory model is used in countries with developed mining industries. In attracting investment, our legislation does not allow us to compete against countries with better legal frameworks. Awareness of all this has been achieved fairly recently," he said.

Substantial Changes

Odilov noted the proposed changes are "significant" and the reform are rather "large-scale" as they would entail changing the old approaches to regulating the commodities sector.

"First, mineral titles are envisioned to be granted through licensing. A license is a short document containing information on the licensee, issuing authority, its duration, the land area, minimum costs and rental fees. The subsoil use rules will be predetermined and license obligations will be foreordained. Licensing cancels the need for tenders, auctions, negotiations and contracting. According to the new model, if an application meets the requirements, then a company is licensed with all the preconditions known in advance. If a company fails to fulfil its license obligations, then they lose the license," he said.

Applications will be reviewed on a first come, first served basis, eliminating the need for biddings and auctions. If a company's application is the first one to meet the requirements, it will be approved.

There will also be a need to introduce a new mechanism to ensure the subsoil user's responsibility for mine closure.

"Currently, subsoil users make annual payments to the liquidation fund in the amount of one percent of the annual expenditures on exploration or mining operations. The size of this fund is often far below the actual costs necessary to close a mine and rehabilitate the land. At present, there is a high risk that the government may carry the burden of covering the remainder of the costs. There was a case when the costs related to mine closure and rehabilitation significantly exceeded the accumulated amount of the liquidation fund. Instead, we intend to introduce a more efficient financial surety system for mine closure and rehabilitation. Surety instruments will be acceptable in the form of unconditional guarantees provided by a publicly listed company with a high credit rating, financial institution or a bank, insurance, letter of credit and deposit. This way, the government mitigates the risk of the subsoil user going bankrupt, running out of funds for mine closure and others. This will entail change in the procedures for evaluation of mine closure costs. Resources extraction will be made impossible unless a mine or field is secured for closure," he said.

Odilov added provisions will also be introduced related to artisanal mining. Prospectors have never fallen under any regulations prior to the proposed reform.

International Best Practices

The reform will be based on international best practices and incorporate the principles of transparency and publicity.

"Any interested party will have access to information on the licensee and the final beneficiaries. The geological information for mineral exploration is planned to be made available either online or elsewhere. For historical reasons, geological data has always been classified information," said Odilov.

"The new approaches to assessing and reporting mineral resources and reserves imply remarkable changes to the extent of the government's role in the process. Once the subsoil users assess the resources by themselves, their assessments will be reviewed by a state commission. The state commission will make a judgement on how accurate the assessment is. However, the private company is the player most interested in being accurate in its assessment, as it concerns its own profits," he added.

Odilov noted a self-regulated organisation will be an improved method for controlling the assessment of mineral resources and reserves. The draft law suggests involving competent bodies by following the examples of Australia and Canada, rather than the government's hands-on direct involvement.

"They have to be members of the self-regulated organisation serving on the Committee for Mineral Reserves International Reporting

Standards (CRIRSCO) and assess the mineral resources in accordance with Kazakhstan's Code on Reporting Mineral Resources and Reserves, which was based on the CRIRSCO templates. The current reporting standards applied in Kazakhstan are not recognised to such extent. We have to have resource reporting standards the rest of the world is familiar with," he said.

Kazakhstan has already established a self-regulated body (Kazakhstan Association of Public Reporting of Exploration Results, Mineral Resources and Mineral Reserves) and passed the KAZRC Code.

He noted the first come, first served principle is applied in Australia, Canada, Chile, Peru, South Africa and the United States. Introducing the concept in Kazakhstan will allow the country to be efficient and competitive in attracting foreign and local investment in the mining sector.

"New investments mean new jobs and increased tax revenues," he said.

Odilov also noted the need for a comprehensive approach concerning taxation.

"To make sure the new legislation is effective and the reform undertaken by the Ministry of Investment and Development serves its purpose, the reform has to be aligned with the reform of the tax laws. If we adopt the Australian model of minerals regulation, then it would make sense looking into the mining taxation practices of Western Australia aimed at incentivising deeper processing of extracted mineral resources. Unfortunately, the tax initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Investment and Development have not yet found positive response in the Ministries of National Economy and Finance. If the tax reform does not include the tax practice of Western Australia, the mining sector reform may prove ineffective," he said.

The Rationale

Drafting the new code has been a matter of re-evaluating the current state the industry, said Odilov.

"First, the current Law on Subsoil Use of 2010 is outdated. It does not address the current challenges. It is heavily based on the law of 1996, focusing around development of the mineral deposits that were ex-

'We are Pursuing Ambitious Goals', Says Nazarbayev University Provost

By Rysty Alibekova

Nazarbayev University is ready for a new stage in its development, emphasising not only education but scientific research as well. Scientific research should be carried out in line with the relevant objectives of society's on-going development and help in addressing global challenges.

This is the opinion of Nazarbayev University's Provost Dr. Adesida Ilesanmi, who took office in September. In international academic circles, he is known as a successful scholar and administrator. Prior to his appointment, Ilesanmi served as Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (USA).

Ilesanmi, who received his PhD in Electrical Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, served as a research associate and visiting assistant professor at Cornell University. He joined the ranks of the University of Illinois in 1987, where he was a Professor of Engineering Sciences and Electrical and Computer Engineering, as well as special advisor on international programmes and director of the micro and nanotechnology laboratory and Centre for Nanoscale Sciences and Technologies. He also worked on a number of national academy committees and was a member of the prestigious U.S. National Academy of Engineering.

The Astana Times posed a few questions to exchange views on the links between research and education at Nazarbayev University.

Dr. Ilesanmi, what are your first impressions of Kazakhstan?

I have the most positive feeling about what I've seen. The Kazakhs proved to be genial and open-hearted people; it is always a pleasure to communicate with them. I should admit I already feel like a Kazakh to a certain degree!

What was the first thing that drew your attention at Nazarbayev University?

Over the last month, I managed to meet a lot of people. The first thing



Adesida Ilesanmi

that caught my eye was the fact that Nazarbayev University educates open-minded, smart and talented students.

I came to this conclusion as well at the first meeting with Nazarbayev University alumni. By the way, the university has educated two flows of graduates, which is over a thousand people (447 in 2015, 621 in 2016). I saw bright and open-minded people who are ready and eager to work. Most of them have already demonstrated some achievements. Among 514 employed graduates, 25 became entrepreneurs in such spheres as management, healthcare, telecommunications, etc. Each of them presented their business projects providing details on how they were developed. Why am I focusing on graduates? Because they are our "product" that shows our performance.

Of course, the main goal of the university is to give good knowledge and educate the youth. However, another aspect is of great importance as well – educating leaders in different spheres, no matter whether it is engineering, science, technologies or humanities.

Being a newcomer to Nazarbayev University and looking at these guys, I can assure that the university has done a lot; the education process proved to be a good one. I think that Nazarbayev University has reached its first stages of development. Now, we can talk about raising the bar and entering a new stage by more actively involving science into the development of academic education.

Last year, Nazarbayev University was recognised by the Kazakh government as a research university, confirming that the university successfully integrates research into

the educational process. How will the university evolve in this context?

Gaining the status of a research university is a notable recognition, but the most important thing is what we build on the existing basis. Over a short period of university's activity – only six years by now – teachers and research associates of Nazarbayev University have already published more than a thousand articles in international peer-reviewed journals. About 70 percent of the articles were published in partnership between Nazarbayev University's teachers and researchers and international scholars. This shows a high level of involvement of the university with the world's academic community. About 11 percent of Nazarbayev University's scientific articles are among the top 10 percent of publications referenced in relevant scientific fields in the world. Currently, the university implements 213 scientific projects that is also quite a high indicator for such a young university.

How will we proceed? One of the main vectors of the university's activity is search for and attraction of high-ranked professors who are able to teach and share experience with the young generation in conducting research. By that I mean professional, efficient research that will be beneficial for the country and nation in terms of economic and human development as well as improving environment and other climate-related factors influencing human life. This should be research that is able to change to a certain degree the paradigm of scientific and research activity in the state as a whole. It is important to realise that any university, not only in Kazakhstan, that is directly involved in research activities should first address relevant challenges of citizens of the country it is based in and maybe regional problems.

The second goal we are to fulfil is building a proper model of interaction between a younger generation of scholars and that of more mature highly-qualified professors who will use their wealth of experience to help their younger peers to pursue qualitative research and chan-

nel them in the right direction. This is a so-called mentorship, the aim of which is that young scientists, for example Bolashak presidential scholarship's graduates and others having returned to Kazakhstan, could continue their research, become professors and obtain relevant patents.

That is why we are planning to invite Bolashak PhD students and graduates to integrate their research into our processes and interconnect this process with the goals that are acute for the economic development of Kazakhstan. To make it a single chain that unites all the parts to meet the goals in the interest of Kazakhstan. Of course, our goal is ambitious. We are aware of that. But we will try our best!

The third task is obtaining, as a result, patents for research and commercialisation of projects for the benefit of the country. This will prove that the university is choosing the right direction in research.

Being a man of science, you know what material framework and infrastructure is needed to conduct research. How do you assess the current state of the university?

Those who are at our campus for the first time may think that the university is already 20 years old because part of its infrastructure is already built and being used to the full. However, our university is like a child in its actual age. We are just making our first steps.

Several buildings used primarily for research purposes will be put into operation... in 2017. This means that in terms of infrastructure, Nazarbayev University is mostly prepared for pursuing more advanced scientific research. We are planning to invite top scientists to the university so that they assess our infrastructure and, maybe, put forward proposals to equip laboratories and rooms aimed at advancing qualitative scientific and research activity. It is important that these scientists, having visited the country, get interested in the university's activities and want to stay here in order to conduct the research this country needs.

In your opinion, what are the most relevant spheres for research at Nazarbayev University?

There are many of them. Kazakhstan is rich in natural resources, and the goal of some research could be to use them for bringing more profit and benefit to the nation. Moreover, Kazakhstan is located along the Silk Road, which is seeing some kind of revival. The university can pursue research aimed at studying changes in Kazakhstan related to its status as part of the Silk Road Economic Belt projects.

We have opportunities to prove ourselves in other fields as well. For example, Nazarbayev University's schools train experts in business, public policy, science and technology, engineering, international relations, education and other fields. In short, each element of Nazarbayev University's structure is ready to make its contribution to the progress of this nation.

For us, it is relevant to improve the legislative framework of scientific research activities because now there are numerous barriers related to human and material resources.

Another urgent issue in terms of developing science is the need to fine-tune the process of commercialising some research activity. Nazarbayev University pays special attention to these issues.

I thoroughly studied the policy paper [on the "100 Concrete Steps" plan of massive institutional reforms] where Nazarbayev University is given a significant role, particularly in the development of the Astana Business Campus innovative cluster. This cluster will host scientific centres and laboratories for scientific and research projects as well as research and development projects and their further commercialisation. In 2016, Nazarbayev University opened a cleanroom that meets international standards for producing medical products.

The EXPO 2017 site sits just in front of your campus. How do scientists and students at the university participate in this national project, in the development of new energy technologies?

Of course, we won't remain apart from this large-scale project, and Nazarbayev University conducts research related to energy. One of the Engineering School's professors, Zhumabay Bakenov, is carrying out extensive research into energy issues, and some of

his projects will be presented at EXPO 2017. The key element of his research is developing equipment for energy conversion and storage, such as advanced rechargeable batteries and fuel cells, which play a significant role in all spheres of life in our society. It is important for us that we are not only carrying out scientific research but also planning its further commercialisation.

At the same time, about 500 student members of the Nazarbayev University Volunteer Club will participate in the exhibition and help guests feel comfortable at the expo.

What is your top priority in your new position?

Before coming here, of course, I analysed my life. I asked myself a question: Why should I go to Kazakhstan and be involved in such a project? Personally, I am interested in the development of international education, and the second important aspect for me is the development of human potential. I see very skillful and ambitious students striving to do better: this is the key element of development. I want to try to integrate the education process, science and production through increasing the human capital level – which should for sure lead to the growth of Nazarbayev University.

The university trains specialists not only for Kazakhstan, but experts of the international level as well. For example, 11 of our first graduates work at such large international companies as Schlumberger (in Russia and Ghana), Cisco Systems International B.V. (in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands), Step to Web LLC (Russia), Procter & Gamble (Poland), Continental AG (Russia), Booking.com (the Netherlands), International Civil Aviation Organisation (in the UN and Canada) and one graduate works at an embassy of Kazakhstan. More than 500 graduates of Nazarbayev University are employed inside Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev University is not a separate closed establishment existing by itself. The university has already built various partnerships in scientific and education spheres in Kazakhstan and internationally. This is a process of continuous development. That is why this new position for me is an opportunity to be actively involved in implementing the ambitious goals set before Nazarbayev University and contribute to its development.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Kazakh President Introduces New Foreign Minister, Sets Priorities for 2017



By Aigerim Seisembayeva

ASTANA – President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev introduced Dec. 30 newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs Kairat Abdrakhmanov to the senior staff of the ministry.

The head of state also announced the upcoming appointment of Erlan Idrissov as Kazakh ambassador to the United Kingdom and thanked him for his work as foreign minister over the past four years.

Nazarbayev emphasised that in the face of challenging global circumstances the foreign ministry faces new challenges that require new approaches.

“Starting Jan. 1, Kazakhstan will begin its work in the UN Security Council. The fact that we were elected as its non-permanent member is a testament of respect from the global community towards our country. This is an important task that requires the global leadership of Kazakhstan in the movement for a nuclear weapons free world and other in-

ternational issues,” Nazarbayev said.

The President noted that in January Kazakhstan will host the 28th World Winter Universiade, which will be attended by representatives of many countries.

Nazarbayev also drew attention to the upcoming Astana EXPO2017 international exhibition in June-September 2017. “Representatives of 112 states and 18 international organisations confirmed their participation in the exhibition. The success of the event depends on the purposeful work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” the President stated.

Nazarbayev emphasised the need for careful preparation for the upcoming talks on Syria in Astana. [Later in the day, he spoke with President Vladimir Putin of Russia on the phone to discuss the upcoming talks, reconfirming Kazakhstan’s readiness to host them.]

According to the President, an important task for the foreign ministry is to maintain its work on the Eurasian Economic Union, taking into account the country’s national interests.

“In the context of the global economic crisis, an economic dimension must remain the systemic element of paramount importance in the activity of the diplomatic service of the country. It’s necessary to deal with issues of attracting investments and export of domestic goods. In this regard, the work of the Foreign Ministry and embassies should be strengthened. Thorough work should be done on preparation of major international events scheduled next year in Astana – the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation] and the OIC [Organisation for Islamic Cooperation] summits,” the President said.

Nazarbayev also pointed out the need for embassies to monitor the implementation of Kazakhstan’s trade and economic agreements with other states and the importance of choosing the best ministry staff to represent the country abroad.

In conclusion, the Kazakh President praised the ministry for its efforts and congratulated everyone on the coming New Year.

ATOM Project Ambassador: Kazakhstan Can Call for Nuclear Weapon-Free Future for Mankind

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Thinking of New Year’s resolutions, everyone sets goals to become better, faster, larger and one-year wiser. The ATOM Project’s Honorary Ambassador Karipbek Kuyukov is no exception. In a recent interview with The Astana Times, the renowned painter, activist and strong-willed man, whose character has been moulded by terrible life consequences, shared his thoughts about the upcoming year.

Kuyukov’s drive to paint, despite being born without arms as a consequence of exposure to nuclear radiation, was followed by success and acceptance by the world community. He creates his paintings by drawing with his feet and mouth. Today the ATOM Project online petition, launched by President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2012 as part of the nuclear disarmament campaign, has amassed more than 310,000 signatures worldwide. Since its introduction, the ATOM Project has travelled through numerous countries to raise awareness of the consequences of the nuclear past and Kuyukov had the chance to exhibit his works.

“I am an optimist by nature,” he admitted. “I have to be, because I don’t think I have a choice. Therefore everything I do, all the goals I set for myself, in the end, I achieve them. So next year The ATOM Project will get more votes and we will speak louder about the consequences of nuclear tests. Especially at this time, when the threat is as real as never before, from terrorists and people who are inclined to use nuclear weapons, they keep the people around the globe in fear. That’s why I believe The ATOM Project must reinforce its efforts and continue calling on



the people to get to the bottom of this – a world free of nuclear weapons,” he said.

Kuyukov confirmed he has travel plans for next year but preferred to refrain from announcing anything yet.

His plea for a world free from nuclear weapons has been heard at countless events by many experts and parliamentarians and this gives him the strength to keep addressing world leaders who continue the nuclear arms race, noting “they need to start talking.”

“I have a request for all those country leaders with nuclear weapons: they need to urgently sit down and negotiate. First of all, having an arsenal of nuclear weapons is undoubtedly tempting, but there are other means of getting things done. We are all quite tired of the questions about who has nuclear weapons and who doesn’t, who has more or less and threatening with nuclear weapons, in a way, doesn’t make sense anymore. Now is the time to think what legacy we can leave behind for the next generations: no matter Russian or American or Chinese. Someone has to make the first move towards disarmament and then we can observe the domino effect – watching every other nuclear state follow the example. This is how I envision it,” he added.

Kuyukov has also addressed

the people of North Korea whose leadership has been engaged in efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

“I feel terrible for North Koreans as they live in a kind of vacuum that surrounds them and won’t let them speak. They are as human as people everywhere, but they are intimidated and are afraid of the outside world. Sooner or later, their leadership must come to its senses. Putting on blacked-out sunglasses won’t resolve certain issues and this road won’t take you too far,” he said.

Acting together and staying united, Kuyukov said, would help reach the final goal of a safer world for all.

“I think the more non-governmental organisations and parliamentarians who want to join us, the better for us. Our voice will be stronger; in fact, only acting together can we reach our common goal,” he added.

He concluded by addressing every citizen of the Earth no matter his or her skin or eye colour.

“The pain from the consequences of nuclear weapons is equal to all: be it mourning of American people, suffering of the Japanese people or fear of North Koreans. We must be focused on total elimination of nuclear weapons! Kazakhstan is among the leaders in non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and, in fact, Kazakhstan was one of the first countries to completely renounce the nuclear weapons. It was one of the few countries that was not afraid to speak out against the powerful nuclear states; the country that shut down its nuclear test site 25 years ago. I believe Kazakhstan has the right to call for the nuclear weapons-free future, not only for its citizens but for the mankind!” he said.

Idrissov Reports on 2016 Results: UN Security Council Membership, Attracting Investment Major Achievements

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – The then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Erlan Idrissov reported on the main results of the ministry’s activities in 2016 and highlighted the coming tasks of Kazakh diplomacy for 2017 during his traditional annual briefing on Dec. 27.

Idrissov emphasised that the country’s international achievements and successes became possible through President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s peaceful and dynamic foreign policy course.

“The year 2016 has been marked by Kazakhstan’s 25 years of independence. Today our country has become a responsible and respected citizen of the world. The country ... has become a recognised leader in the field of nuclear disarmament and an active moderator in the dialogue of cultures, religions and civilisation,” Idrissov said.

The official noted that the President’s initiatives, such as convening the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, as well as the country’s chairmanship in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Turkic Council played a role in boosting Kazakhstan to among the most dynamically developing countries. Consequently, a growing number of states see Kazakh-



stan as an effective mediator in the peaceful settlement of acute regional conflicts.

“President Nazarbayev has played a key part in healing the Russo-Turkish rift; in bringing about the Minsk-1 and Minsk-2 agreements regarding Ukraine,” Idrissov said.

“In recent days, Kazakhstan has been asked to contribute to resolving the conflict in Syria by hosting fresh talks,” he added.

The main achievement of Kazakh diplomacy in 2016 was the election of the state as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017–2018.

“Central Asia will be represented in the UNSC for the first time in its history. Our membership is a chance to attract the attention of the Council to regional security issues. We recognise the tight connection between security and sustainable development. Our goal at the UNSC is to represent Central Asia so that two years of our membership benefit Kazakhstan and the region,” Idrissov said.

He reported that Nazarbayev has appealed to the leaders of all the Central Asian countries to develop a region-wide platform for Kazakhstan to promote at the UNSC.

He emphasised that Kazakhstan’s membership in the UNSC will involve chairmanships in three committees: on Afghanistan, ISIS/DAESH/Al-Qaeda and Eritrea/Somalia. He also stressed that during Kazakhstan’s rotating chairmanship of the UN Security Council in January 2018 it will seek to get a relevant resolution on Afghanistan and Central Asia adopted.

“In accordance with the President’s instructions, economising the foreign policy of Kazakhstan is our top priority. More than 300 relevant events were organised abroad in 2016,” Idrissov said.

Thus, the Foreign Ministry’s activities were geared toward attracting foreign investment, improving the investment climate, promoting export products in overseas markets and implementing the transit and transport potential of Kazakhstan.

“We have carried out significant liberalisation of the visa regime. The investment headquarters under the Prime Minister, which works with investment policy, began its operations. Investment advisors were sent to our missions. The front offices of the National Agency for Export and Investment KAZNEX INVEST and trade missions were established abroad,” Idrissov noted.

According to the diplomat, the expansion of cooperation on major infrastructure projects with international financial institutions, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Asian Infrastructure Invest-

ment Bank (AIIB) also received focus. More than 30 international agreements on large-scale funding of key sectors of Kazakhstan’s socio-economic projects were conducted. In general, Kazakhstan attracted \$20 billion of foreign direct investment in 2016. “We work closely with our largest neighbours and strategic partners Russia and China. The strategic partnership with the United States is dynamically developing. We are optimistic about prospects of future cooperation with the administration of Donald Trump. The European Union is our largest trading and investment partner. We do active work on developing mutually beneficial cooperation with the brotherly states of Central Asia. We are looking forward to cooperation with Uzbekistan and newly elected President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Relations with the key countries of the Arab world, Asia, Africa and Latin America are also in progress,” Idrissov said. He further dwelled on relations with Uzbekistan when responding to questions stressing that Astana welcomes new beginnings in Uzbekistan’s relations with regional neighbours and, together with Tashkent, is working on a 10-year trade and economic cooperation programme.

According to Idrissov, the past year was productive for President Nazarbayev’s international activities, who conducted official visits to 21 states and met 15 foreign heads of state, government and international organisation in Astana. In total, 49 international events and 81 bilateral visits were carried out.

The Foreign Ministry has also ensured broad and meaningful par-

ticipation of foreign countries in EXPO 2017.

“As of today, we received confirmation of participation from 112 countries and 18 international organisations. There are 91 agreements of participation signed and 103 national section commissioners appointed,” Idrissov said, and the campaign continues.

“We continue working on leaving a good legacy from EXPO 2017. One such legacy is the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC), which aims to turn Astana into a regional financial hub by creating favourable and attractive conditions for investment and finance. Another legacy of EXPO 2017 will be the International Centre for Transfer of Green Technologies under UN auspices,” he explained.

On the eve of EXPO 2017 in Astana and Winter Universiade 2017 in Almaty, the ministry continues the work on visa facilitation and increasing the efficiency of migration control and security in order to create relaxed conditions for foreign guests.

Idrissov announced that as of Jan. 1, 2017, citizens of 45 nations will have an opportunity for 30-day visa-free travel to Kazakhstan including nationals of member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU), as well as Malaysia, Monaco, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Kazakh foreign minister went on to say that Astana will be seeking to begin negotiations with the European Union on visa facilitation next year, which is a subject very high on the agenda for both the

ministry and the Kazakh citizens who have increasingly demanded less burdensome process of getting their Schengen visas.

Regarding plans to enter the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Idrissov said, “We work hard to move closer to OECD standards and will continue to advance.”

Next year the ministry plans to strengthen coordinated work on attracting foreign investments and developing and promoting the AIFC.

“Implementing the Foreign Policy Concept of Kazakhstan for 2014–2020 will continue. We intend to give full support to the efforts to resolve the situation in Ukraine on the basis of the Minsk agreements. Through careful monitoring and analysis of [international developments] we will develop proposals for their solution,” Idrissov added.

In addition, Idrissov noted that EXPO 2017 will be a platform for discussing global and regional problems and finding the right solutions, making it a place where important preparation for other major international events can take place.

“EXPO 2017 will also see the first ever Science and Technology Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in September, as well as the 16th annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in June,” he explained.

An important event in the coming year is the 25th anniversary of CICA. Today, CICA is a credible, effective global cooperation platform of 26 Asian countries, stretching from Egypt and Israel to China and Vietnam in the field of security, new challenges and risks, Idrissov noted.

Nation&Capital

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

PEOPLE

Denis Ten Featured as Anime Character in Famous Japanese TV Series

B2

CULTURE

Kazakh Painter in Romania Teaches Culture, Traditions and Customs

B3

SPORTS

Kazakh Short Track Speed Skaters Ready for Winter Universiade

B7

Nutcracker – Astana Opera’s Must-See during Holiday Season



By Lyazzat Shatayeva

ASTANA – Legendary choreographer Yuri Grigorovich is back at the Astana Opera. “The Nut-

cracker” is the maestro’s third ballet staged at the theatre, along with immensely popular “The Sleeping Beauty” and “Spartacus.” He will turn 90 on Jan. 2 and to mark the occasion presented a new produc-

tion of the timeless classic, running Dec. 25-Jan. 8 in the capital. In 1891, world-renowned choreographer Marius Petipa commissioned Peter Tchaikovsky to compose music for Alexandre

Dumas’ adaptation of Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman’s tale “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.” The ballet, which premiered the following year, was not popular. **Continued on Page B3**

Dombra Cover of Metallica Song Strikes Chord

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – Twenty-nine-year-old Almaty resident Gleb Ponomaryov recently released a dombra cover and video of Metallica’s “Battery,” which has sparked a great interest among internet users gaining almost 40,000 views in a few days.

“As an old fan of the Metallica band, I always wanted to do a cover of one of their songs. I have noticed that some riffs of heavy metal bands vaguely remind the sound of some Kazakh kuis. The common thing is that the sound is very dependent on rhythm. In addition, guitar riffs are usually played on two strings, which is also similar to the principle of playing the dombra. I have chosen the song ‘Battery’ not by chance – it features very melodious entry and the main part consists of a fast and rhythmic patterns. I wanted to focus on this contrast,” Ponomaryov told The Astana Times.

Commenting on the video, some people even wrote that they were convinced of listening to the Kazakh kui until they read the name of the video. Ponomaryov also noted that he never learned to play dombra. However, he plays other string instruments.

“When my friend presented me a dombra, I picked it up and immediately began to play it like a guitar. I think that experienced dombra players noticed that my technique is not perfect and differs from rules. However, I tried and did my best. I will keep learning,” he hopes.

Ponomaryov has been playing the guitar since he was 15 years old. Being a teenager, Ponomaryov created a garage team with friends and even held several performances.

“Now, music is only my hobby. I create melodies only during my leisure time, though I wish I had more time for it. My latest experiment caught the interest of Kazakhstan citizens. I had more than 40,000 views to my video in a couple of days. Now I have some interesting ideas and I hope the audience would like it too. I think it will be better to keep the secret and make a surprise,” Ponomaryov shared with the paper.

Besides making music, Ponomaryov often creates social videos through which he tells people about old things but from a new angle.

“This is my personal civic initiative. I produce them on my own and present them to the public. For example, I went to the Kasteev Art Museum [in Almaty] and I was inspired by paintings. As a result, I made a short movie named ‘Alive



Paintings of Kazakh Artists, motivating the audience to get closer

PONOMARYOV:
“I have noticed that some riffs of heavy metal bands vaguely remind the sound of some Kazakh kuis. In addition, guitar riffs are usually played on two strings, which is also similar to the principle of playing the dombra.”

to the art. I am sure that social advertising starts working thanks to innovative approaches. Therefore, I am constantly experimenting,” he said.

Ponomaryov has also applied his skills to environmental issues.

“I try to show what I care about: environmental problems, city development and corruption. About five years ago, I painted a social cartoon demonstrating the problem of spitting on the streets. The idea was to show the isolation of this problem. Most of the children copy what the adults do and adults need to show an appropriate example. As a result, the video was appreciated by the audience, gaining thousands of views in the internet and receiving a nomination in the Social Advertising Competition,” Ponomaryov remembers.

The talented creative is also fond of studying languages. He speaks Serbo-Croatian language and is currently studying the Kazakh language. In addition, Ponomaryov is fond of writing and travelling.

“I often go to our magnificent mountains with my friends, where we will also shoot some short videos. Thus, we are trying to draw public attention to domestic tourism and to instil a love of hiking.”

Aitys: Gem of Kazakh Spoken Literary Tradition, Platform for Human Rights

By Lyazzat Shatayeva

ASTANA – Kazakh literary tradition has historically been rich in spoken literature expressed through a variety of genres, among them songs, proverbs, tales and epics. Aitys, one of spoken literary genres, stands out among the others as a combination of poetry, public speaking, performance art and music.

The art form is deeply social. A parallel can be drawn between aitys and modern rap, because both, stylistically, occupy a grey area between speech, poetry and singing. Aitys has risen and fallen with the evolution of Kazakh culture. Even in times of repression, the art form was maintained; now it is seeing a resurgence, and international recognition.

Aitys, a synthesis of poetry, music, drama and performing arts, is a public show of talent where two akyns (musicians, vocalists and songwriters all in one) compete in a poetic singing dispute. Akyns enter the contest without pre-written lyrics or prior prepara-



tion and take turns improvising a rhymed impromptu answer to keep the chanted conversation flowing, competing in wit, intellect, hu-

mour, ingenuity and originality. The improvised verses are most commonly sung to the accompaniment of a dombra (a long-necked

two-string instrument), a kobyz (an ancient Kazakh bowed instrument) or an accordion.

Continued on Page B2

Astana Pro Team Presents Roster for 2017

By Anuar Abdrakhmanov

ASTANA – The Astana Pro Team’s new roster was presented last month in the capital.

This time, the format changed slightly and along with a traditional press conference and presentation ceremony featured the riders’ visit to an orphanage and a meeting with cadets at a specialised sports school.

Astana Pro Team’s General Manager, London Olympics 2012 champion Alexander Vinokourov, named the team’s main tasks for 2017.

“Astana has earned victories in big races. Nibali’s departure will not change our strategy. We have

young talented riders, such as Fabio Aru, Alexey Lutsenko and others. Our main task is to succeed at Giro d’Italia. The lineup heading there will fight for the overall victory at the race. As for Tour de France, [we count on] Jacob Fuglsang, who has progressed immensely in recent years, and following his success at the [Rio 2016] Olympics is mentally prepared to fight the favourites. An overall win will be [hard to claim], but making it into the top five is realistic. At the same time, I want to see how our Kazakh riders will perform. They already know that we will test them at Tour de France. This is a race in which for every professional cyclist it is important

to try oneself at least once and not every rider has such a chance. As for Vuelta, it will be clearer [who will lead the team at the race] after the first two Grand Tours,” he said.

The team’s budget in 2017 will remain at last year’s level, according to Amanbek Kulchikov, Executive Director of the Astana Presidential Professional Sports Club, which brings together a number of major sporting projects supported by the Samruk Kazyna National Welfare Fund.

“We have a decade of work behind us and now can openly say that we will put an emphasis on [helping the development of] our own Kazakh riders. Next year, Astana’s Tour de France lineup

will be half-Kazakh. Sponsors come to us because of our team’s name – not because of the stars, but because Astana has created its own brand and working with the Kazakh team became prestigious,” he said.

The riders will use new bikes this year from Argo 18, a Canadian manufacturer, as well as new uniforms and equipment from Italian manufacturer Giordana. The items were also presented at the ceremony.

Riding for Astana Pro Team in 2017 are 28 riders from nine countries, including Kazakhstan, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Ukraine, Estonia, Colombia and Russia.

Continued on Page B7

THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

ASTANA OPERA

- January 11 at 7 p.m. La Traviata, Opera
- January 15 at 6 p.m. Notre-Dame de Paris, Ballet
- January 19 at 7 p.m. By the Fireside, Concert
- January 22 at 6 p.m. Birzhan Sara, Opera
- January 25 at 7 p.m. Gala Ballet, Ballet

BARYS ARENA

- January 16 at 7.30 p.m. Barys vs. Salavat-Yulayev, Hockey

KAZAKHSTAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

- December 15 - January 30 Steppe Legend, Exhibition

PEOPLE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Denis Ten Featured as Anime Character in Famous Japanese TV Series

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Kazakhstan's top figure skater and Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics bronze medallist Denis Ten spotted himself Dec. 16 in the famous Japanese anime series "Yuri on Ice" while visiting the country of the rising sun.

"I congratulate all the Kazakhs on the Day of Independence," he said on his Instagram account addressing his fans from Japan.

"Meanwhile, the anime-series 'Yuri on Ice,' about figure skaters has become really popular in Japan. On this holiday, there was an episode released with my prototype-character," he added.

"Yuri on Ice" has been airing since October. Its protagonist Yuri Katsuki, after an unsuccessful streak in figure skating, decides to take a break from the sport and leaves Japan for the U.S. for college. After graduating from col-



lege and coming back to his native country he rediscovers the sport once again and this time his new drive and motivation drag him back to figure skating and make him a top contender among his competitors leaving only one rival Yuri Plisetsky from Russia.

Ten's character is Otta Beck Altdin, an 18-year-old figure skater from Kazakhstan, who is popular in

his own country but is reticent and shy despite eloquent skating. The story is not too different from Ten's and their fathers in the story and in real life share the same name, Yuri.

The character Altdin launched his senior debut by winning third place in the World Championships. Ten debuted in The Hague, the Netherlands at the age of 13 and finished 10th overall. He has had numerous

triumphs in international competitions since, including a bronze medal at the Sochi 2014 Olympics in Russia skating for Kazakhstan, which was the only medal for the country in Sochi.

In 2004, Ten and his mother moved to Moscow to pursue his talent and in 2010 they moved to California. At different times in his career, he has been coached by such renowned names as Rafael Arutyunyan, Elena Buianova and Tatiana Tarasova. Now, he frequently visits his home country where he has many fans.

Being an ethnic Korean born in Kazakhstan, Ten also has a huge following in East Asia and numerous fan clubs across South Korea and Japan.

Among his major triumphs are: gold at the 2011 Asian Winter Games, gold at the 2015 Four Continents Championships, bronze at the 2015 World Championships in Shanghai and in London in 2013.

Karaganda Motorcyclist to Start her First Long-Distance Journey



By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – Karaganda resident Yuliya Ivanova is soon planning to embark on her first long-distance motorcycle ride. A group of experienced motorcyclists from the Russian city of Tyumen will accompany her.

"This upcoming motorcycle ride will be a new experience for me. I am planning to cover 5,500 kilometres by motorcycle with my Russian friends. Previously, I used to travel in comfortable circumstances. This time, we are going to sleep outside in a tent. I believe we will have a great time. Riding a motorbike will make the journey doubly interesting," Ivanova told The Astana Times.

The young enthusiasts intend to start the extreme journey in June. The two-week route will run through the beautiful landmarks of Russia and Mongolia. Ivanova and her friends are anticipating an exciting trip to see the snow peaks of the Altai Mountains, boundless steppes of Mongolia and crystal blue waters of Baikal Lake.

The motorcyclists will ride the Chuysky Trakt, the auto road that goes from Russia through Altai to Mongolia. They are excited to visit known locations and the distant, exotic, unexplored and attractive country of Mongolia with its unique culture and pure nature.

"I am eager to experience new emotions and I am ready to face some challenges. I need to get out of my comfort zone. It is quite interesting to live in a field condition. When you leave home and have hundreds of kilometres to ride, the inner world seems to be filled with incredible feelings," said Ivanova.

This idea belongs to her Russian motor friends. Last summer she rode to Balkhash Lake where she met likeminded people and recently joined the ranks of motor fans. She noted one feels indescribable emotions riding a motorbike.

"I do not think it will be a difficult journey. Perhaps there might be a breakdown of motorcycles on the road due to bad weather or road, especially in Mongolia, but I think the failure can be fixed quickly. In general, nothing frightens me at all. Even if we face difficulties during our trip, they will not spoil the vivid emotions that I'm going to get," she added.

Ivanova works as a design engineer for a local organisation. Recently, she decided to make a little extra money working as a taxi driver in the evenings, as she must accumulate the required amount of money to cover the trip's expenses.

"To make my dream come true, I need to buy another motorbike that is more adapted to ride on bad roads, off-road and highways. Now, I am looking for sponsors who will be willing to possibly help me in purchasing a new vehicle," she said.

Ivanova bought her first motorcycle two years ago when she realised she was living a boring life and needed to diversify her daily life experience. She is looking forward to the summer trip.

The motorcyclists will gather in Omsk (Russia) and head to Altai. They then expect to cross the Russian-Mongolian border and reach Ulan Bator, the country's capital. The travellers will move to the northern part of the country to cross the border and ride in the direction of the lake. The journey will end in the city of Irkutsk, where the Russians will put the motorbikes on trucks and return by train. Ivanova has not yet decided how she is going to end the journey.

The young and energetic resident of Kazakhstan's mining city wants to take a camera and small laptop with her. She is planning to share short videos and post photos of breath-taking places on social networks.

Aitys: Gem of Kazakh Spoken Literary Tradition, Platform for Human Rights

Continued from Page B1

The earliest mention of aitys as a folklore genre can be found in the chronicles of the 11-12th centuries. Makhmud al-Kashgari's first comprehensive dictionary of Turkic languages, "Diwan Lughat al-Turk" ("Compendium of the Languages of the Turks") written in 1072-74 was intended for use by the Baghdad Caliphs who were controlled by the Seljuk Turks. Al-Kashgari's dictionary contains the features of old Turkic poetry traditions. In a chapter titled "Aitys of Summer and Winter," the scholar wrote a rhymed dispute between the two seasons.

Khoja Ahmed Yassawi, a Turkic poet, scholar and early mystic who had a tremendous impact on the development of Sufi orders throughout the Turkic-speaking world in the 12th century, dedicated a chapter to the "Aitys of Hell and Heaven," a rhymed debate of oppositions in his famous "Diwan-i Hikmet."

Aitys developed not only as a literary and musical genre, but as an old folk tradition, the major and most anticipated entertainment at every Kazakh festivity and celebration. The rise of the tradition was seen in the 19th century, at a time when Kazakh music began to develop as an independent folk art, free from religion and ritual. This period was truly a spiritual renaissance of the nation, in which musical traditions flourished.

There were several types of aitys. Kaim-aitys and sure-aitys were most common. Kaim-aitys

was a singing improvisational competition between young novice akyns. It was a communication form with an aesthetic touch that took place at friendly gatherings and evening tables. Such aitys were also often held between groups of young men and women as a form of playful courtship and singing conversation, in which the young people could express their sympathies and affection in a subtle and respectful manner.

Sure-aitys was a serious competition featuring a more dramatic delivery, complex content and lengthier structure. Only experienced masters of improvisation and oration with knowledge of history, culture, politics, intertribal relations and everyday life were allowed to enter these competitions.

These competitions were major events, with the place and participants announced in advance so more viewers could attend. Akyns represented different regions and tribes. When they publicly debated, the spectators were naturally divided into opposing teams cheering for their representative. It was the public that judged the akyns and defined the winner.

Structurally, sure-aitys consisted of three parts. First, the akyns presented themselves and their backgrounds and praised their famous ancestors and war heroes. Next, the akyns would debate important social issues. They had to spar to the point where it became obvious that one of them had presented weightier arguments, funnier jokes, smoother rhymes and

better performance overall, leaving the opponent incapable of an equally eloquent reply and flow. The rules of conduct required the losing contestant to admit defeat during the race and retreat peacefully and gracefully. After the culmination, the winning akyn ended the debate with a summary of his glory.

The winners were awarded valuable prizes. The main prize, however, was the public's recognition of the winning akyn's talent, wit and eloquence. Talented akyns, often viewed as sages, had colossal influence on public opinion and enjoyed immense, nationwide fame and dedication from fans.

Akyn's performances often reflected the overall sentiments prevailing among the people. They inspired the public and channelled concerns of the common people to those in power. Depending on the competing artists' talent and status, the akyns covered a wide range of topics. Many of them were social philosophers attracted to Enlightenment thinking who expounded rhythmically on social injustice, women's inequality, corruption, malpractice in governance, archaic traditions and ignorance.

The most gifted akyns, including Orynбай, Shozhe, Suyumbai, Birzhan, Zhambyl and Aset, received national recognition for striving to break the centuries-old patterns of class division and strengthen social mobility, literacy and the pursuit of cultural exchanges.

Women akyns like Sara, Aksulu, Manat, Bolyk and Ryszhan were

proponents of women empowerment, challenging the common perceptions of women's role in the society. They advocated for girls' education, using their leadership, fame and influence to argue for more individual liberties for women and for increasing their societal involvement and participation.

In the beginning of the 20th century, famous performances such as the aitys between Birzhan and Sara, Zhambyl and Sarybas were recorded and the lyrics were written down.

During the Soviet era, for political reasons, aitys were scaled down to a rare local occasion. The art form, however, was passed down from one generation to another and was preserved by a handful of akyn-dynasties.

The tradition was revived in the 1990s after Kazakhstan became an independent state and Kazakh was restored as a state language. Ever since, Sure-aitys has been held in large concert halls to mark holidays and important dates, gathering thousands of spectators. The competitions are often aired on national television, drawing the attention of millions. As in classical aitys, contemporary akyns raise important social issues, examine government officials' work, join in the rhetoric and conversation on sensitive matters and chronicle the on-going changes in the country.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) added aitys to its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on Dec. 2, 2015.

Young Kazakh Author Presents Book in London

By Zhazira Dyusseimbekova

ASTANA – Eleven-year-old author and illustrator Maide Akan, who lives in the capital, presented her book "Aysu and a Magic Bag" at the Open Eurasian Literature Festival & Book Forum in London in late November. The book, which addresses environmental issues, is the first in the series and was published by Hertfordshire Press.

"The children's fairy-tale is filled with non-childlike arguments about environmental protection which could not fail to arouse the interest of the public, including the youngest participants of the festival. It is surprising and quite remarkable that this serious global problem is not indifferent for the young generation. In her book, Maide tells the amazing story of a girl whose life is no different from ordinary children, until one day she meets a magic bird. This is how the extraordinary adventure



of Aysu begins and her efforts to preserve the environment. Written with a charm and elegance that belie her young age, the story by Maide Akan is a skilful blend of fantasy and more contemporary human problems. Beautifully illustrated by the author, the book about Aysu is sad and a little bitter, but it is full of youthful hope for

the future," said the festival organisers.

The story is a wonderful tale about magic and adventure which will be interesting for both children and adults, noted Eurasian Creative Guild Chairman David Parry. Even the history written about Central Asia will be charming for English-speaking readers.

In addition to writing books, Akan is engaged in eco-design and she showcased AYBAG, her own collection of eco-bags. The brand's motto is "Protection of the environment is not only for adults, but also for children." The youngest participants received bags as gifts.

The talented young writer was marked at the festival poetry evening "Voices of Eurasia" and awarded with the international association's "Generals of the World for Peace" medal. Akan is currently working on the next story in the series and new designs for her bags.

Hertfordshire Press, which published the book and supports the festival, is part of the Silk Road Media Group. Founded in 2002, it specialises in publishing scientific and popular literature by Eurasian authors, as well as the re-releasing of important works of the past which are unavailable in English.



CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Young Filmmakers Demonstrate Works at Saryarka Short Film Festival

By Lyazzat Shatayeva

ASTANA – The Saryarka Short Film Festival introduced the works of young Kazakh filmmakers to a wider audience. Festival screenings were held Dec. 18 at the capital's KazMedia Centre.

The mission of the Saryarka Short Film Festival is to support young filmmakers, boost the country's film industry development and become a networking platform for creative young people and professionals of Kazakh cinema.

"More than 200 movies were filmed in Kazakhstan in the past two years. We needed a festival showcasing the achievements of the young Kazakh cinema. Our filmmakers often win in different nominations at festivals abroad.



Samgar (L) and Talgat (R).

We needed to somehow emphasise this and show our young filmmakers that our cinema is moving forward," festival co-

rganiser Anuar Kenzhibayev told the media.

Astana Zhastary (Astana Youth), the capital's youth resource centre,

acted as the main organiser of the event. Centre head Anuar Nurpeisov, the well-known Kazakh actor who starred in popular films like "On Alty Kyz" ("Sixteen Brides") and "Skaz o Rozovom Zayce" ("The Tale of a Pink Hare") and the TV series "Againdy" ("Brothers"), was the mastermind behind the festival.

"We were happy with the quality of the submitted pieces. I dare to believe that Kazakhstan is ready for large-scale festivals. We have great content and directors who can surprise with their creativity," he said.

Twenty-three domestic short films of 63 submissions and five additional films were showcased as part of the screenings. Each film's duration was shorter than 15 minutes. According to the rules of the competition, the directors, many

of whom were university students, had to be younger than 29.

Saryarka short film festival awards.

During the breaks between screenings, the competitors and spectators were able to take a variety of workshops and meet young, promising film directors such as Olzhas Beilov, Kanat Beisekeyev and Medet Shayakhmetov.

A panel of judges, consisting of film critics, directors, actors, producers and other representatives of the country's film industry, determined the winners in seven categories. Baurzhan Nogerbek, film critic, professor of art history, historian and cinema theorist, was the jury chief.

"Malybaydagy Okiga" ("A Story in Malydylai"), directed by Rakhym Samgar, won the Audience Award. Film Actor won two nominations –

Roman Gusak as Best Cameraman and Kazbek Rustembekov as Best Director. Olzhas Taigelov earned Best Screenwriter for the script of "Aizhan." Tolganai Talgat won Best Actress for her role in "Obyknovennye Lyudi" ("Ordinary People") and Dulyga Akmolda was named Best Actor for his role in "Marshrut" ("Route"). Darkhan Tulegenov, a director from Uralsk, won the grand prize for his picture "Marshrut."

Tulegenov has been seen at many film festivals in the past few years. In 2015, the director won consecutive grand prizes at events in Almaty and Bishkek for his short film "Luchsh Utrennei Zari" ("Ray of Dawn").

The youth short film festival was held in the city for the first time, but organisers intend to make it an annual event.

Kazakh Painter in Romania Teaches Culture, Traditions and Customs

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – Not many people are lucky enough to find their calling on time and love and succeed in what they do best while also being far from their home country. Painter and a master student Alua Tebenova is one such creative individual, building her artistic career in Romania.

"My connection with fine arts began when I was starting school. Once my father picked me up from school, while handing me a big A3 folder full of painting materials he said, 'My daughter, your mother and I made a decision to get you into a school of painting and we are heading to your first lesson right now!' I was pleasantly surprised and excited about it!" she said.

Tebenova graduated with honours after five years of study at a regional painting school.

"I began worrying about what profession to choose, who to become and what to do in the future as the moment to select a specialty approached during senior school," she recalled.

Tebenova comes from a family of health professionals and lecturers and no one was an arts university graduate. She thought of choosing to become a doctor like her parents, but with a bachelor's degree from the professional arts faculty of Karaganda State University in her hand, she realised she wanted to continue her creative path.

"Without ruminating for long, I decided to go on with what my heart desired, producing pictures, being a creator and getting to know the art world," she said.

She is now a master student of pictură (painting) at Universitatea de Artă și Design din Cluj-Napoca (Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca) in Romania, one of Eastern Europe's leading universities in the fine arts.

"My schedule allows me to do what I wish to, producing paintings and compositions which I consider 'must be here and now,'" she noted.

She recently produced four paintings with an ethnical theme. In these works, the painter stresses her attempt to impersonate her affection for Kazakh culture, descendants of nomads and traditions.

The titles of her paintings centre around the content of the works such as "The Keeper of the Steppe," "Golden Soul" and "The Bride."

"I place great value on special aspects of a composition, details of traditional Kazakh clothing and colouring," said Tebenova.

Her paintings also play an edu-

cational role for students, lecturers and others because they get to know about Kazakh culture, traditions and customs through her drawings.

"I deepened into an ethnic theme just a little while ago when I was doing my thesis work at Karaganda State University. I embodied my idea of integrating music, colours and reflections together," she said.

She noted the goal was to make her works in sync with one another and create a musical melody on canvas.

"Having learned in detail about Kazakh [musical] instruments both in theory and practice and discovering how rich, valuable and historically unique our culture is, I carry on and I think I will continue 'searching for treasure' in Kazakh and nomad culture through paintings, telling to ours and a future generation about things they did not come to know yet," said Tebenova.

She also paints portraits of people who inspire her as creative individuals in film, music, arts, theatre and other fields, which has become a way to earn money. Many people show interest in Tebenova's techniques and are glad to have a portrait in a certain style and genre. The young artist added she feels happy to realise her customer's ideas.

Tebenova finds oil and acrylic as congenial work materials, as they can convey the richness of colours and shades and realise ideas and conceptions.

The painter does not support contemporary arts and believes a painting should speak for itself.

"Understand everything an artist thought and experienced in a

single look at a painting and catch the subtlety of an author's idea and conception," she added.

Romanian and European students find her paintings unusual and offbeat.

"They are not used to seeing such art and the reaction is ambiguous, but this doesn't stop me. I respect everyone's opinion, because every person has their own vision of what a work should look like," she said.

Tebenova finds inspiration in paintings of artists from different centuries and genres like classic Rembrandt, Austrian contemporary artist Voka and Scotsman Scott Nainsmith. Bakhytnur Burdysbekov, Madikhan Kalmakhanov and Nurlan Kilibayev are among many Kazakh artists whose works she respects.

Music is an essential part of her work process and an additional source of inspiration. The tunes can be traditional Kazakh compositions or instrumental music depending on her mood and the theme of a painting.

She added she likes to travel and discover new places which impact her artistic views.

During her study years, she managed to participate in exhibitions of young painters from Karaganda and show herself in competitions of different kinds of art.

"I plan to implement something from myself in exhibitions and vernissages in Romania and Europe. I have many ideas and plans; I will be moving towards my goal bit by bit and perfect my art. I will be creating, developing and presenting a good quality product while my hand is able to pass across the canvas and sort paints," said Tebenova.



Kazakh Writer's "Kirpichi 2.0" to Be Adapted by Kazakhfilm

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – The Kazakhfilm studio will make a full-length feature based on "Kirpichi 2.0" (Building Blocks 2.0), a book by Kazakh writer Daniyar Sugralinov. The story revolves around a man who has been wishing to change his life for a long time but does not know how to make it happen.

Daniyar Sugralinov. Photo credit: Sugralinov's Facebook profile.

"Having set his 'alter ego' free on his way to success, from a good-natured and humble kindly soul our hero turns into a cruel, selfish person who stands for nothing. He betrays his prior principles and his faith in human unselfishness. Having lost all his friends he eventually remains with no one but himself. The character then realises that he compromised his integrity while trying to change his life," the film

studio explained, according to Tengrinews.kz.

"He falls into a severe depression where his only salvation lies in excessive drinking. Hitting rock bottom, he almost completely self-destructs. But people show compassion for him and selflessly help him to get out of the deep hole of hopelessness. Seeing this, the hero finds faith in people and love again. He gets back on his feet step by step, coming to life again as a completely new person," the statement said.

Farkhat Sharipov wrote the script and will direct the movie based on the book. He is known for films like the 2010 drama "Skaz o Rozovom Zaitse" ("Tale of a Pink Hare"), the 2013 comedy "Inoplanetyane ni pri Chem" ("Not the Fault of Aliens") and "Akzhol."

Sugralinov has said that his book targets young people unsatisfied with their lives as its main audience.

"The book [aims to] give them

the desire to spread the wings and do something to make their lives better, more smooth and beautiful. As for the book's film version, about a year ago Farkhat Sharipov came up to me. He liked the work and the main idea. We have been collaborating for a year now and filming has finally begun," the book author said.

A number of changes will take place in the film version but they will not distort the gist of the book. The heroes may be older and problems may be more topical, according to Sugralinov.

"Kirpichi 2.0" contains 27 chapters and was put up for sale in autumn 2014. The first "Kirpichi" book "blew up" the internet, earning more than 2 million reviews.

Kazakhfilm is also beginning to film "Shala Kazakh" (a derogatory term meaning "Half Kazakh") and "Samaya Krasivaya. 14 Kyz" ("The Most Beautiful. Fourteen Girls").

Nutcracker – Astana Opera's Must-See During Holiday Season

Continued from Page B1

Distinguished choreographer George Balanchine presented a revised production in 1954, breathing new life into the ballet and sparking the attention of critics and spectators. For more than seventy years, almost every ballet company in the world has performed "The Nutcracker" during the holiday season, bringing joy to children and adults and making its splendid music one of the most recognisable classical arrangements.

The ballet tells a story of a young girl, Marie, who is shrunk to the size of a mouse, and her beloved Nutcracker, who goes to war with other toys against the evil Mouse King. The Nutcracker is later transformed into a beautiful prince and he and Marie travel to the kingdom of the Sugar Plum Fairy to rule and live happily ever after. As everyone prepares for the royal wedding, Marie wakes up with her favourite nutcracker toy by her side to find it was all a magical dream.

Grigorovich has brought bold novelties to the classical ballet. By fully trusting the grandeur of Tchaikovsky's music, the ingenious choreographer and his assistants Ruslan Pronin and Oksana Tsvetnitskaya have turned the sweet fairytale into a deep reflection on the unattainability of ideal happiness and a poetic story about maturing and anticipating love.

The capital's ballet artists have carefully prepared for their parts. The vast array of emotions and



impressions that Marie develops through her scenes are masterfully conveyed by Gaukhar Usina's musicality, alluring grace and instinctive expressiveness.

Tair Gatauov, who recalled wanting to play the leading part in the ballet as a youngster, noted his wish has finally come true.

"Despite its seeming ease and dreamlike quality, the part is very difficult; it requires the dancer's maximum effort. I perform the Nutcracker-Prince's part, which has a large number of supports; I'm like an elevating crane for two hours on stage," he joked.

Every female dancer naturally dreams of playing Marie's part, yet in addition the ballet has a range of interesting and memorable characters like Harlequin, Columbine, He-Devil and She-Devil and Spanish, Indian, Chinese, Russian and French dolls.

At the premiere, the spectators erupted into applause during the

comedic act of the Chinese dolls' dance. In contrast, absolute silence reigned during the snowflakes' dance which created a fantastic atmosphere of dormant nature in winter.

Prop masters, costume designers and tailors had a feast preparing for the shows, noted the opera house's press officers. Fifty pairs of snowflakes made of nylon mesh on a thin metal base have been used to create an illusion of snow falling on the stage. The feeling of wonder and enchanting atmosphere have been achieved with the help of a giant Christmas tree, massive decorations and colourfully dressed toys that come alive.

The Christmas novella was a smash hit and the top grossing production in the Astana Opera's repertoire in previous years. This year, the opera house has increased the number of performances to 14 during the holiday season.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Central Asian Break-Dancers Defy Gravity at 2016 'Dance to Be Free' Festival

By Lyazzat Shatayeva

ASTANA – Second annual street dance competition brought together nearly 300 participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Russia in the Kazakh capital in December.

The dance festival "Dance to Be Free" was true to its title and appealed to contestants as young as five and adult dancers with long-standing careers. The eldest of the participants was a 63-year-old dancer by the stage name Sansyzbai aga.

The international street dance championship was held with the joint efforts of Kazakhstan's 23 Hip-Hop Federation and the United States Embassy in Astana to mark the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan-U.S. diplomatic relations.

The three-day long festival presented a rigorous programme, including a number of master classes from famous break-dancers and



hip-hop artists, dance competitions in a variety of categories and for different age groups and demonstration performances from some

of the world's biggest hip-hop dance stars.

"Kazakhstan's hip-hop culture saw a boom six-seven years ago,

but started slowing down in the past two years. So we wanted to bring the motivation back to many of the dancers and spice things

up within the street dance community. Such championships push the young dancers to set goals, train harder, and to be excited about their craft. Giving new incentives to the local dancers was the main idea behind the festival. Such championships are also a great opportunity for networking, exchanging knowledge and experiences, and building new friendships." Adlet Anarbekov, popular Kazakh break-dancer and founder of 23 Hip-Hop Federation, told The Astana Times.

The biggest guest of the festival was the legendary B-boy Poe One, a member of the Style Elements crew, arguably one of the most influential break-dance groups of all time. He is considered one of the five dancers who have had the most significant impact on the break-dance culture on the U.S. west coast.

B-boy Poe One met with young dancers, gave master classes and acted as the main judge of all the dance battles during the championship. The battles were conducted

in five nominations – kids' crew, kids' solo, professional crew, b-boy solo and power move.

"All the battles were dynamic and emotional. Performances were often personal. That was fascinating. Judgement was unbiased since the judge was very experienced. He saw the dancers for the first time and had no predisposition towards any of them," one of the participants, Dias Altynbekov, commented.

"We've also had newcomers and great surprises. For instance, Kazakhstan's former break-dance champion, Simple Systems crew was defeated by the newcomers from Uralsk," he added.

The Dinamic Crew from Taraz won the junior crew title, Atomik from Almaty won the kids' solo nomination, Hot the Sonic from Atyrau became the winners in the professional crew category and Fast Man from Uralsk was titled the best solo performer. B-boy Neutron from Almaty won a Golden Shoe for the best power move.

Children's Special Education Centre Opens in Kostanai Region

By Azamat Syzdykbayev

ASTANA – A new centre for children with special educational needs has opened in the Kostanai region.

Comprehensive professional assistance by specialists, including a therapist, psychologist, speech therapist, visual impairment specialist, deaf and hard of hearing teacher and massage therapist is offered for children and their families.

The project was launched as part of the Different-Equal: We Are for

prepare them for inclusive education.

Kostanai region Akim (Governor) Arkhimed Mukhambetov granted a certificate for 1 million tenge (US\$2,999) for the purchase of special equipment for an audiology room and a certificate for the purchase of computer equipment.

"There was only one regional psycho-pedagogical centre 25 years ago. Now there are more than 15 organisations in the region. Today, we are opening a new psycho-pedagogical correction centre for children. I wish success to the fund specialists and benefactors in



Inclusive Education project initiated by the Dara Fund with the support of the Kostanai region akimat (governor's office).

DOSSAYEVA: "Our task is to promote the principles of an inclusive society. The children with special educational needs have access to the specialists free of charge at the correction centres."

The correction centre plans to provide support for more than 150 children from birth to seven with developmental disabilities who are unable to visit other places and

their work. There are 13 centres in the country thanks to the fund's activities," Mukhambetov said at the centre's opening ceremony.

According to Dara Fund founder Gulnar Dossayeva, children with challenges are in need of such places.

"Our task is to promote the principles of an inclusive society. The children with special educational needs have access to the specialists free of charge at the correction centres. We also provide training for the specialists and support inclusive education implementation in our country," Dossayeva said.

The centre is designed to be a barrier-free environment, including wide doorways, no thresholds, colour signals and handrails. The offices are equipped with modern equipment and teaching materials. There is also a Montessori room equipped with special books and games and a room for physiotherapy exercises.

EBRD to Provide \$4.53 Million for Ust-Kamenogorsk Airport Modernisation

Staff Report

ASTANA – The Eurasian Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is set to allocate 1.5 billion tenge (US\$4.53 million) for the modernisation of Ust-Kamenogorsk airport, according to iap.ru.

To complete the project, it is necessary to attract 5.2 billion tenge (US\$15.7 million). In addition, the Kazakh government is going to allocate one billion tenge (US\$3.02 million) and 2.5 billion tenge (US\$7.55 million) will be provided from the regional budget.

After the modernisation, the

runway will be extended to 2,800 metres and widened to 45 metres. It is also planned to build a cargo terminal, temporary storage warehouse and rescue station and to install lighting equipment. Now, a new arrival terminal with a capacity of up to 200 people per hour is being constructed in the international airport of the regional centre. The facility will be commissioned by mid-2017.

"Airport reconstruction will ensure a smooth operation and will allow taking all international flights without any restrictions," said Nikolai Korolenko, president of Ust-Kamenogorsk Airport.

Construction will begin in 2018 and will last approximately 22 months.

At present, the total investment portfolio of the regional akimat with the EBRD amounts to 245 billion tenge (US\$739.9 million), including preliminary treaties and loan agreements totalling 43 billion tenge (US\$129.86 million).

Meanwhile, the regional budget for 2017-2019 years was approved recently at the regular session of the East Kazakhstan regional Maslikhat (assembly). Its total size is expected to reach 304 billion tenge (US\$918.08 million). According to this document, the

budget of region's development should be about 124 billion tenge (US\$374.48 million), timeskz.kz reports.

These funds will be used to solve socially significant tasks set by President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Of these, 11 billion tenge (US\$33.22 million) was allocated from the National Fund to implement the Nurly Zhol state programme of infrastructure development.

In 2017, it is planned to construct a bridge across the Bukharta Reservoir in Kurchum district worth almost 24 billion tenge (US\$72.48 million).

Kazakh Programmers Develop Game to Test Users' Knowledge of Countries

Staff Report

Kazakh programmers recently created an intellectual quiz mobile application "Smart Country."

The application is for all ages and offers the opportunity to play against people from all over the world: the opponent is determined randomly.

The idea is to demonstrate your knowledge of an opponent's country better than he knows yours.

According to Talgat Taiymov, one of the developers, the mobile application provides a unique opportunity to learn interesting facts about other countries and to tell the world about Kazakhstan.

"We were motivated to make Kazakhstan recognisable in the world when creating this application and to show people from other countries our history, rich multi-ethnic culture and achievements over the years of independence and the most beautiful places and sights," explained Taiymov.

He first had the idea about a year ago when he and his friend were playing PlayStation against an American. In the chat, Taiymov and his friend mentioned they

were from Kazakhstan and it was clear they opponent had no idea where the country was located. That's when they decided to create a game that would introduce Kazakh culture and history to the world.

"At first, we are planning to launch the game in more than 20 countries. Then we will expand the number to 260. We are still picking the first 20 countries. These will include the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), European and North American countries," he added.

The game is built so that each

winner earns points to raise the rating of their country on the world intellectual scene. Quizzes are held in three rounds.

"The questions will be very different but every one without exception will be able to play it. We are writing some parts of the content and some parts are being written by others. At the moment, the game is undergoing the test mode. Ukrainian specialists are helping us in the creation of the game."

It is expected that in the new year everyone will be able to download the game on iOS and Android operating systems.

No more than 200 pureblood tazy live in Kazakhstan today. Kazakh tazy is an ancient dog breed well suited to the nomadic way of life of the Asian peoples. Their numerous depictions on petroglyphs in south Kazakhstan are dated to different historic eras. The Persian saluki greyhound is believed to be the most likely ancestor of the tazy.

The tazy, however, is not yet recognised by the World Canine Organisation (the Fédération Cynologique Internationale). Domestic experts are trying to boost the image of the breed, which many consider a national attribute.

"We continue the tradition of our ancestors to revive the pure-blood tazy breed. As a matter of principle, these dogs are not picky and they are smart. This breed is considered number one in Kazakhstan because they are our favourite," dog breeder Asset Shaltayev shared.

In addition to dog racing, the event also included a traditional hunt with an eagle, said Shaltayev.

Hunters Show off Speed of Their Dogs in Karaganda

By Azamat Syzdykbayev

ASTANA – Hunters recently showed off the speed of their Kazakh borzoi (dog breeds) at a competition during a traditional hunters' kurultai (meeting) in Karaganda.

"Today's race must confirm the tazy's (type of Kazakh borzoi dog) endurance. Kazakh borzoi should overcome 300 metres in a certain time. The fact that the lure is a mechanical hare, a never yet seen animal for the tazy complicates the competition. Yes, the distance is short for a Kazakh tazy. The dog can run for days," said one participant.

A male dog named Basar showed the best result by running 300 metres in 30 seconds. Competitions were not just for entertain-

ment. Dog handlers also needed field tests of dogs.

"We are now selecting the best breeder. We watch their offspring [to make sure they are Kazakh tazy]. When puppies are born they appeared

to be Russian borzaya on the outside. We keep them out. It is the breeding work on tazy being conducted," Chief Cynologist, or dog handler, of the Kansonar National Hunters Association Inna Nazarenko said.



SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

'Worthy Citizen of Kazakhstan' Winners Receive Apartments from BI Group



By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – Citizens of Kazakhstan chose not one, but two of their countrymen to win the "Worthy Citizen of Kazakhstan" award in transparent online voting held from Nov. 15 to Dec. 25.

Two candidates, Murat Kabybayev and Marina Cheishvili, received the most votes in the project organised by BI Group, the largest investment and construction holding of Kazakhstan. BI Group's management decided that both candidates deserved the main prize of the competition, so each was given a one-bedroom apartment in a popular residential area of Astana.

"The hearts of our citizens were touched by the story of incredible dedication and fortitude of Marina Cheishvili. She recently experienced a personal loss and today helps people struggling with cancer. Marina Cheishvili and Murat Kabybayev are engaged in solving problems of our society: adopting children from orphanages and dealing with saddening diagnoses," said the project's organisers.

Cheishvili became a social worker in a cancer ward after the loss of her son, Amiram, to cancer. She decided to remain in Astana to help people facing this terrible diagnosis.

"By helping these people, we become better, kinder and more compassionate. Many people wrote me and I heard words of love. In this routine work, you do not expect people to thank you. Those letters full of kind words were a great support for me. When my son was sick, I spent a year asking for a help. I received such strong support from the people. I flew on this energy. Then, after a time, remembering those feelings and emotions, I thought I would not be able to experience such feelings again, feelings of boundless gratitude for the powerful stream of love that was poured out on me. I was again plunged into this love thanks to this competition," Cheishvili said.

"When my children found out about this competition, of course, they wanted to vote for me, but I asked them to read the story of each candidate. Thus, my daughter was delighted with Azamat [a musician with limited sight]. My

daughter plays the piano and he was a great motivation for her. These stories are worth talking about," she added.

Kabybayev is a former mullah. One day he decided to help people in another way. Everything began with a family problem: he and his wife could not have children for a long time, and when after nine years they finally had a son, they came to the joint decision to adopt 10 children of different nationalities.

A member of the social movement Rebyonok Dolzhen Zhit' v Sem'e (A Child Must Have a Family), Kabybayev outlined that all candidates were worthy of victory. He thanked the BI Group Holding, organising committee members and the people of Kazakhstan and offered New Year congratulations to all.

Ten citizens of Kazakhstan were nominated for the national vote. They were defender of the rights of persons with limited abilities Almaz Yerzhan; "To Be, or Not to Be" filmmaker Aziz Zairov; founder of the social project Club 28 Petel (28 Loops) Karla Nur; founder of the Zdorovaya Aziya (Healthy Asia) Fund Nagima Plokhikh; musician Azamat Temirbayev; international grandmaster Zhansaya Abdumalik; pilot Dmitry Rodin; film director Yermek Tursunov; Cheishvili and Kabybayev.

The Organising Committee has opened bank accounts with 500,000 tenge (US\$1,503) for the other eight nominees.

All of the nominees were determined to be examples worth following. Organisers filmed video clips about each nominee and wrote articles about their activities and heroism for voters to read.

Head of Astana's Orthodox Church Wishes All a Merry Christmas

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Senior churchman of the Russian Orthodox Church Father Dmitry from Astana discussed the difference between the Orthodox and Catholic Christmas and the meaning and importance of the holiday as he congratulated the people of Kazakhstan on the season.

"The attitude of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches to Christmas is similar. The difference is in calendars," he explained in a Dec. 26 interview. "Everything is quite simple. Historically, the Eastern Orthodox Church lives according to the Julian calendar, while the Western Christian church lives according to the Gregorian calendar. The difference between them is 13 days. We celebrate the same event – the Christmas of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

"Christmas is a holiday that is supposed to start the saving of mankind. After all, why did Christ the Saviour come into the world? He came to take on our human nature wounded by sin. God became a man to heal mankind; he created himself, mankind, which has fallen away from the Lord into sin," he said.

"God gave man freedom and see how we use our freedom. We don't use it kindly at all," he added.

Father Dmitry likened sin to a virus spreading through humanity.

"A man himself could not manage it at all, because it is above our nature. We need something special, supernatural. Therefore, God becomes a man, with our infirmity, illnesses and weaknesses. But he does not have personal sin, and this is why he was able to defeat



that sin, change human nature and make possible the purification of human nature," he said.

"In these rather difficult economic times, I would like to wish all the Christmas miracle, which will touch all our hearts, and I would like to wish everyone to become like little children for a while. I mean children in the sense that children more genuinely perceive our world... without guile and without self-interest. I would like us to treat each other with kindness and never stop believing in miracles. I would like everyone to work together for the good of our country, which is also very important," Father Dmitry said.

"I often read comments in social media written for various events and news and I see that someone is always accusing our government, someone blaming our leaders. But in fact, many of these people do not want to do anything. We always want to have someone do something for us. Therefore, I wish that each of us take part in the development of our state for ourselves, giving our fair contribu-

tion. I would like a baker to bake really good bread that can be eaten the next day. I would like to wish our military men to honourably defend our homeland, our diplomats to do their work properly, raising the image of our country to a new level. I would like to wish our officials to care about the welfare of our people. And I would like people to not blame each other, but to do the best they can for building our future and making our lives better. This is very important; this is all we need," said Father Dmitry.

"I congratulate everybody and wish Merry Christmas to all people of any faith! By the decree of President [of Kazakhstan Nursultan] Nazarbayev, this day gained the status of an official holiday, which can't be found in any other country of the former Soviet Union. Even in Russia, this holiday is not specially marked and is celebrated in the series of holidays. It shows the good, fraternal relations of our country. We need to continue developing that," he said.

The Russian Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas on Jan. 7.

Kasiety Zhol Public Foundation: Inspiring Mission to Help Kids with Special Needs

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – The Kasiety Zhol (Sacred Path) Public Foundation was established in 2009 to provide charitable assistance to children from underprivileged families, orphanages and children's homes. Director Gulmira Abeldinova believes children have great capabilities; they only need a little help. In an interview with The Astana Times, she talked about the foundation's activities, goals and hopes.

"The history of the foundation started when I saw kids from the Astana children's home who were unable to sit, hold a toy in their hands and chew food without help. A doctor at that institution asked me to give those children a chance for recovery. Then, we brought them to foreign countries for treatment and surgery. The most surprising thing was that after treatment, the vision of those kids improved; some kids started to take steps, walk independently and hold a spoon. They got great happiness to be close to their mothers. Of four children, two kids returned to their biological families; one was adopted by a couple," Abeldinova shared with the paper.

This story gave Abeldinova an understanding that there were no "hopeless" children or "irretrievable" cases. It was too challenging, however, to take all kids with cerebral palsy abroad. It was expensive, there were many needy children and the majority of special children needed constant and long-term rehabilitation. It was also difficult for children to stay outside the home for a long period. Therefore, it became necessary to develop rehabilitation in Kazakhstan and the foundation gradually moved away from targeted assistance to comprehensive assistance.



One of the ailing children during the Tusau Kesu ceremony.

"In general, the foundation's history tells a history of happy coincidences. In 2013, we met a wonderful person, Dr. Ainura Nurkhodzhayeva, who dreamed of opening a rehabilitation centre for children with cerebral palsy. The foundation had a desire to help and the concept of this assistance, as Ainura possessed professionalism. Then, we got assistance from the Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund in the face of Darkhan Kaleyev. He is an amazing man who understood the problem and found a constructive approach. Thus, we opened the first Kasiety Zhol rehabilitation centre in 2014 in Astana," said Abeldinova.

The centre covers an area of 350 square metres and employs 20 specialists. The staff involves people with kind hearts, cheerful character and great professionalism.

From morning until evening, they are involved in activities with children and study during the intervals between courses of intensive rehabilitation.

"We invest a lot in our staff training, because we want to show that it is not necessary to go abroad for quality rehabilitation. We have created a model of rehabilitation that became successful. The parents of special children and our partner recognised its effectiveness. Now we are introducing this experience throughout the country, opening small rehabilitation centres. The second centre will open in Shymkent. In this centre, we will take infants with a cerebral palsy risk. We believe that after the rehabilitation, at least half of these babies will not be diagnosed with cerebral palsy later. Thus, gradu-

ally we will open centres in each region," she said.

The organisation is implementing three major projects. Under Healthy Kids, specialists provide rehabilitation assistance to children from poor families and children's homes.

"Unfortunately, the number of children with cerebral palsy in our country is large and it is growing every year. Today, there are more than 19,000! The country lacks places of free rehabilitation and children are forced to wait for years. Project Healthy Kids was created three years ago to address this situation," said Abeldinova.

During the past three years, 763 kids have undergone comprehensive rehabilitation. The centre is equipped with excellent facilities. Competent physical rehabilitation featuring the best techniques of neuro-rehabilitation and equipment has resulted in significant improvements in the children's conditions.

"We have a wonderful tradition to hold a 'Tusau Kesu' (literally "cutting the rope") ceremony for a child that learns to do the first steps despite the age. It is very touching; a life-affirming ritual symbolising the victory of a child over the illness and over the circumstances. In addition, this ritual gives hope to other mothers of special children. For such moments, we need to work hard and never give up," said Abeldinova.

School of the Mentors focuses on developing human capital, expanding knowledge and exchanging experience with leading experts in the field of medicine. Under the project, scientists and practitioners from the UK, the UAE, Russia, Germany and Turkey arrive in Kazakhstan and hold training for local specialists.

"Earlier this year, we invited

specialists from Russia's Dmitry Rogachev Centre for Paediatric Haematology to teach paediatric oncologists-resuscitators to set infusion ports for chemotherapy. Previously, children went to Europe to install and remove the port. Now, there is no need to leave the country. Of course, the training of the Kasiety Zhol Rehabilitation Centre staff is our priority. By investing in their education, we get high quality rehabilitation," she said.

Through #KazakhstanTvoritDobro (Kazakhstan does good deeds), designer Gaukhar Zhumbekova decorated walls of Astana Children's Hospital No. 2. She created amazing drawings, looking at which cure and treatment are becoming merrier.

"The Academy of Arts' students took up this initiative and painted the walls of the neurology unit in the same hospital. We also had volunteers at district hospitals in the

South Kazakhstan region. Again, we met a wonderful girl Aikerim Zhmagaliyeva who encouraged volunteers to paint the walls in the regional children's hospital of Shymkent, where we are planning to open the second centre," said Abeldinova.

This project implies a variety of interesting activities, but its main purpose is to draw attention to the problems of children with cerebral palsy and launch 14 rehabilitation centres throughout Kazakhstan. Regardless of profession, gender, age or religion, people show their kindness and compassion and achieve common goals.

"I chose a career when I studied at school. I am a speech pathologist. Thanks to the profession, I have always been close to these children and their families. Now, it is a great happiness for me to be able to help them, although it is unbearable to see the tears of mothers, desperate fathers and sadness in the eyes of the children. Happy people do not come to our foundation. People come with pain and problems and ask for help. Nevertheless, the success of these children and relighted hope in the eyes of parents inspires us to go further," she said.



TOURISM&EXPO 2017

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

IRENA to Participate in EXPO 2017

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) officially confirmed its participation in EXPO 2017 during the recent meeting of IRENA Director General Adnan Amin and EXPO 2017 Commissioner Rapol Zhoshybayev in Abu Dhabi.

The sides reviewed Kazakhstan's current and potential cooperation with IRENA, including the agency's participation in the expo and the joint promotion of the EXPO 2017 theme, future energy, at major international platforms. Zhoshybayev also discussed Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's global initiatives in the field of sustainable development, which have received international support.

They discussed the possibility of holding an IRENA panel session during the Ministerial Conference of the UN European Economic



Commission in June next year in Astana, which will take place within the framework of EXPO 2017, as well as organising training for Kazakh specialists at the IRENA Secretariat.

According to Amin, IRENA is very interested in participating in the expo because of the logical connection between the organisa-

tion's pillars and the future energy theme. Salem Al Ameri, deputy general director of the UAE's National Media Council, pointed out that the UAE was the first Arab country in the Middle East to officially confirm its participation in EXPO 2017. It was also noted that the country invited Ralph Appelbaum Associates, the world's largest

developer of exhibition and museum designs, to help develop the concept and design for its pavilion.

The UAE pavilion will demonstrate advanced technologies and scientific developments in the field of renewable energy.

Zhoshybayev also met with Anca Westley, who directs Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week & Special Projects for the Masdar Company; Frederic Theux, president of Reed Exhibitions Middle East; and Naji El Haddad, executive director of the World Future Energy Summit that will be held on Jan. 16, 2017 in Abu Dhabi. In 2017, the summit will focus on trends in financing renewable energy projects, the importance of energy efficiency in existing and future buildings, smart infrastructure and innovation. In 2016, the exhibition at the World Future Energy Summit brought together 600 companies from 32 countries and more than 30,000 attendees from 150 countries.

Air Astana Named Best Foreign Airline



By Kseniya Voronina

ASTANA – Air Astana recently won the Sheremetyevo Airport Award for the first time in the category “Best Foreign Airlines – Passenger Choice.” The award was based on votes cast via the airport's social media, according to the press service of the airline.

Sheremetyevo Airport's SVO Awards were established two years ago to encourage the airport's partners to improve punctuality, quality of passenger service and success in production activity.

KLM was named “the most punctual foreign airline, carrying more than 100,000 passengers annually at the airport Sheremetyevo.” In the same category, but less than 100,000 passengers, the award went to Finnair. Korean Air received an award for the best level of passenger service.

“Choice of passengers of business class” went to Air France. In the category “The leaders of growth,” awards went to AirBaltic and Ellinair. Both have increased their number of passengers by more than 80 percent in a year.

Sheremetyevo International Airport was recognised as the best airport in Europe for quality of service in 2012 and 2013 and second on the continent in 2014 in the ASQ (Airport Service Quality) rating by ACI (Airports Council International). It is also Russia's largest airport servicing regular international flights. The route network of Sheremetyevo Airport has more than 200 destinations.

According to the results of 2015, passenger traffic at Sheremetyevo amounted to 31.6 million people, while for the first 11 months of this year Sheremetyevo served 31.27 million people.

Regulations Reducing Visa Categories, Paperwork Come into Force in 2017

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – New rules reducing the number of visa categories from 14 to three and reducing the paperwork necessary for a visitor to obtain a visa to Kazakhstan will come into effect Jan. 1.

Under the new rules, visas will be divided into type A for diplomats, officials and investors, type B for short-term visitors and type C for long-term visitors.

The changes also affect visas for the families of foreign diplomats accredited in Kazakhstan, study visas and visas for persons working in the Astana International Financial Centre and others.

The new rules are meant to streamline the visa process and bring them in line with national legislation and international standards. They are also meant to attract more foreign investment and ease the burden on businesses traveling to Kazakhstan.

“We wanted to create simple, clear, modern and comfortable rules based on the interests of our citizens, who actively cooperate with foreign partners, as well as for foreign nationals interested in Kazakhstan. I am convinced that it will open up additional opportunities to the business community for cooperating with the outside world and facilitate international contacts

in different spheres,” said Kazakh Minister of Foreign Affairs Erlan Idrissov Dec. 20 while holding a joint briefing with First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Marat Demeuov for representatives of diplomatic corps, business community and local and foreign media.

Idrissov added that the changes are a key component of a package of measures to create a convenient and transparent visa regime. Another significant change coming into effect is the transfer of authority for the registration of entry invitations from foreign businesses and individuals from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

“This will result a significant liberation of the process of preparing invitations, as it will be carried out not only in Astana and Almaty, but also in all regional centres of the migration police units,” Idrissov said.

In turn, Demeuov noted that Ministry of Internal Affairs employees have been trained on the new regulations. The foreign ministry will continue to work with invitations from foreign ministries, diplomatic and consular institutions of foreign states, international organisations and their missions.

The foreign ministry plans to post the full text of the regulations on its website and get it published in the media.

Pavlodar – Cultural and Arts Centre of Northern Kazakhstan



Frosty Pavlodar City

From perfect email support before our arrival to a friendly welcome upon our arrival... They made our stay in Pavlodar extremely enjoyable and I will definitely stay at this hotel again when I am next in Pavlodar,” wrote a commenter from Newcastle and Gateshead (England).

What to See

A large Kazakh mosque, Russian Orthodox church and statue of Kazakh poet Sultanmakhmut Toraiyrov are the main attractions in Pavlodar.

If you want to see a Russian Orthodox church, visit the Cathedral of the Annunciation on the banks of the Irtysh River. It provides a great view of the city and has a public park next to its square.

“The Church of the Annunciation is an extraordinary feat of engineering and is one of the most beautiful recently constructed religious buildings in Kazakhstan. It is both an important cultural and spiritual centre for the city of Pavlodar,” noted a tripadvisor.com commenter from Italy.

Mashkhar Zhusup Mosque has exceptional architecture and is one

of the most beautiful and largest mosques in the country.

“From an architectural point of view, the mosque is meant to resemble a heart, open to peace, kindness and good will,” a commenter mentioned.

Merchants' houses, museums of interest, the old Chekhov Drama Theatre and concert halls are the city's historic and cultural attractions.

Pavlodar has many parks, alleys and boulevards; however, the central embankment of the Irtysh River with its fountains and beach is deemed the main and one of the most romantic locations for walking.

Pavlodar has quite an active nightlife with several nightclubs that play electronic and house music; some also feature 1980s or 1990s music. Bowling alleys, movie theatres and game clubs are fun for evening leisure and nights out.

If you have free time, go skating on weekends at the Ice Arena. The local hockey club plays there as well.

Bazaars, shopping centres and grocery store chains are available if you need to make any purchases.



Mashkhar Zhusup Mosque

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – See a Russian Orthodox church, visit the old Chekhov theatre, take a walk along the bank of the Irtysh River or enjoy the nightlife in Pavlodar, one of the biggest and oldest cities in the country.

Located on the river's edge, Pavlodar is a fairly quiet former Soviet city in northeastern Kazakhstan. Its population was 335,185 as of January 2016.

Pavlodar is also a large industrial city that for years has housed several of Kazakhstan's big enterprises such as Aluminijy Kazakhstan, Kazakhstanskiy elektrolizniy zavod and KSP Steel.

In summer, the city with broad streets and avenues is surrounded by green parks, fountains and flowerbeds.

How to Get There

Trains run from Almaty, Astana, Kyzylorda, Zhezkazgan, Moscow and Chelyabinsk.

Flights on Air Astana are available both from Astana and Almaty, on Bek Air from Almaty and SCAT Airlines from Astana (as of Jan. 6).

Long-distance and regional buses are available from most surrounding cities.

Where to Stay

Most hotels in the city are “old and tired” Soviet-style hotels, but there are a few which have received some of the best reviews on tripadvisor.com.

One commenter noted that Altyan Adam Hotel is good for short visits to the city. The river is nearby and the personnel are polite and friendly.

“Altyan Adam Hotel is basically a bed and breakfast place in a large suburban house. You decide on the time and content of breakfast at check-in. Nevertheless, the rooms are large and comfortable,” another reviewer noted on the website.

Dvin Hotel has received positive feedback from guests. It is recommended as a comfortable and modern hotel with excellent service, spacious and comfortable rooms, an English speaking staff, good price and location. Trams are nearby; cabs can be also arranged at reasonable prices.

The hotel has a bar, breakfast spot, restaurant and café with Armenian and European cuisine. Saunas and swimming pools are available for an additional fee.

“I am happy to report that the service at the Dvin Hotel is fantastic.

Passenger Trains Launched from Astana to Regions



By Kseniya Voronina

ASTANA – Two new electric passenger trains servicing Karaganda, Kokshetau and the Kazakh capital were recently launched into service in dedication of the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence.

The trains meet international and Customs Union standards and include the latest technology, such as a passive safety system, video surveillance systems and an information and entertainment website using Wi-Fi technology. Passengers can also watch movies and play video games as well as access information about their trips in Kazakh, Russian and English.

The train to Karaganda departs from Astana at 2:55 p.m. and stops in Vishnevka, Osakarovka and Karaganda sorting depot. The train to Kokshetau departs from

Astana at 3 p.m., stopping in Akkol, Makinka and the Borovoye resort. Cost of travel ranges from 1,300 tenge (US\$4) to 1,500 tenge (US\$5).

The trains are equipped with lifts to board passengers with disabilities as well as designated toilets, doors and chairs for them.

A representative of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy reported that the company plans to launch two more electrical trains in the near future.

Railway transport is a crucial part of the production infrastructure of the state. Kazakhstan's geographic conditions include a lack of direct sea access and vastness of territory, which makes the role of railway transport important. As of today, Kazakhstan Temir Zholy is a backbone infrastructure company, providing cargo transport necessary to grow the Kazakh economy. The company employs more than 140,000 people.

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Sokol Race Track Offers Professional Driving Conditions

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Car and bike enthusiasts near Almaty will soon have a safe track for practicing their high-speed driving skills (and enjoying the thrills that go with the pastime). Other drivers on the region's icy roads can breathe a sigh of relief – the daredevils now have a place to play.

"In addition to the fact that the track is the only one of its kind and has no equal in the Central Asian region, it provides economic benefits, creates a positive image of the country and contributes to the development of motorsports, infrastructure and tourism," said Public Relations Manager of Sokol Race Track Lola Rakhimberdy in an interview Dec. 19.

Sokol Race Track was designed and constructed by foreign architects and engineers and corresponds to all international requirements and standards. The large ring, which will be finished by the end of 2017, will be able to host auto and motorcycle championships including the World Championship Moto Grand Prix, the FIA World Touring Car Championship, Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters (DTM) and the Superbike World Championship.

Governments around the world support private motorsport tracks, as they give national motorsport teams a place to practice and provide opportunities for ordinary people to improve their driving skills in safe conditions. By the end of next year, Almaty's motorheads and sportsmen will enjoy the same privileges.

"We decided to construct the track due to the lack of conditions for professional and amateur sportsmen. The sportsmen didn't have a place where they could hone their skills at all – they had to do this in city streets, which is illegal and is not safe for city residents. All sports events were also held in very small places and or-

ganisers couldn't invite as many participants and visitors as they wanted because of the lack of space," Rakhimberdy explained.

"Our people really were striving to take part in motorsport events in various disciplines and they were ready to go anywhere, even to remote countries. But now, Kazakhstan residents do not need to leave the country, because they have everything here at home," she added.

"The creation of the track will allow our state to test cars and hold international motorsport competitions and major events. Sokol Racing Track has well-developed infrastructure that will accommodate a great number of spectators and participants. The track provides a high level of safety and comfort for any motorsport event," Rakhimberdy said.

"Our track is extremely popular among motorsport lovers," she noted. The company is always pleased to see drivers and fans at events, she said, and even organises shuttle transfers for event participants and guests.

Sokol has a large racing ring (the one that is yet to be completed), a drag strip, a kart track and a drift ring. The track's large ring will be 4,495 metres long and 15 metres wide. Maximum speeds on its straightaway can exceed 300 kilometres per hour. It will have five right turns on the track and eight left turns.

Sokol's drag racing strip is complete with up-to-date telemetering equipment and displays to show results. The total length of the drag strip is 866 metres, with an additional 348 metres of road dedicated to slowing down.

The kart track is 1,650 metres long and encompasses a variety of turns, straightaways and pit lanes. It is 10 metres wide and has 12 boxes in the technical area.

The drift ring occupies 16,000 square metres and was specially designed for holding international drift events.

Astana Pro Team Presents Roster for 2017

Continued from Page B1

In addition to Lutsenko, the winner of last year's Tour of Hainan, Kazakhstan will be represented by Zhandos Bizhigitov, Dmitriy Gruzdev, Artyom Zakharov, Andrey Zeits, Arman Kamyshev, Bakhtiyar Kozhatayev, Ruslan Tleubayev, Daniil Fominykh, and Nikita Stalnov. Among the 10 newcomers are two interesting riders, Moreno Moser and Michael Valgren, from whom the team's managers anticipate serious help for the leaders.

Astana Pro Team is a top-level team in the world of professional cycling, representing Kazakhstan and regularly winning races and stages across the world, in-



cluding in Europe, Asia, North America and Australia for more than a decade. The team's tro-

phies include prizes from victories in some of the world's most prestigious cycling races,

including the three grand tours, Giro d'Italia, Tour de France and Vuelta a España.

Kazakh Short Track Speed Skaters Ready for Winter Universiade

By Anuar Abdрахmanov

ASTANA – Short track speed skating is gaining momentum in Kazakhstan. The beginning of a new winter season 2016-2017 was marked for the sports world by Kazakh short track racers winning medals of various colours in World Cup stages.

Team Kazakhstan became one of the few rivalling the sport's trendsetters, including South Korea, the U.S., Canada, the Netherlands and Russia.

At one of the recent International Speed Skating Union (ISU) World Cup stages, which took place in Salt Lake City Nov. 11-13, the Kazakh skaters won two places on the podium: gold for Abzal Azhgaliyev in the 500 metres and bronze for the national team in 5,000-metre relay.

A month later at another World Cup stage, Dec. 9-11 in Shanghai, Azhgaliyev was fifth in the 500-metre heat, Aidar Bekzhanov's was sixth, and Nurbergen Zhumagazyev also finished sixth in 1000 metres.

In Gangneung, South Korea, on Dec. 16-18, Team Kazakhstan again updated its medal tally. Danish Nikisha won silver in 500 metre while 26-year-old Zhumagazyev, who has



behind him more than a decade of participating in World Cup stages with finishes mainly beyond the top 30, finally won his first gold, which came in the 1,000 metres.

In the World Cup classification, with four stages out of six completed, Abzaliev ranks second and Nikisha seventh in the 500 metres, Zhumagazyev fifth in 1,000 metres and the national team sixth in the 5,000-metre relay.

Team Kazakhstan's head coach Madygali Karsybekov says recent successes in short track are no accident but the outcome of hard work.

"Kazakh short track speed skating's history spans more than three decades. As for me, in 2002, I went to Oral [a regional centre in north-western Kazakhstan] where there was a new speed skating arena. Dautel Turlykhanov, who then headed the governmental agency on sports and tourism, backed my plans and connected me to the region's governor Krymbek Kusherbayev. Good conditions were created for us and I started developing short track in the city. In three years, I tested more than 5,000 children and selected among them less than one percent

of the most promising ones. Years later, there remains four or five boys from them who have developed into world-class athletes," Karsybekov recalls.

A strong impetus to the sport's increasing popularity in Kazakhstan was given by Kazakh skaters' surprising performance at the Winter Olympics 2014 in Sochi where the national team made it into the final of the 5,000-metre relay and ranked fifth there, an unprecedented success.

"Following Sochi, across the nation, interest in our sport increased greatly. Now it is developing in ten regions. If one recalls its history, short track speed skating in Kazakhstan in Soviet times was first cultivated in the western city of Aktobe and then in other regions. Following the USSR collapse, development of short track practically stopped. It only survived in the Kostanai region. Since 2002, a new stage for short track in Kazakhstan began. Although now it is practiced in many parts of the country, the leaders are West Kazakhstan and Atyrau regions, as well as Astana. Gradually, other regions close in. Admittedly, domestic competition is growing every year," Karsybekov says.

Now the national team readies for new international starts, with Winter Universiade 2017 in Almaty among them.

"We aim to win there at least gold, silver, and bronze medals. Naturally, most of our hopes are on our men's team who are already in leading positions internationally," the coach concluded.

World Universiade 2017 Unveils Torch Relay Route

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – The World Universiade 2017 torch relay will begin its journey in Kazakhstan by lighting the flame Jan. 25 in Astana. The flame will then continue to Ust-Kamenogorsk, Pavlodar, Kokshetau, Petropavlovsk, Kostanai and Karaganda Jan. 26 and Aktobe, Uralsk, Atyrau and Aktau Jan. 27. The route then continues to Kyzylorda, Shymkent, Taraz and Taldykorgan Jan. 28 before the final lighting of the flame in the host city of Almaty Jan. 29.

The rehearsals of the torch light pro-

cession with the participation of top sports people of Kazakhstan was held in Almaty in early January. The ceremony unites the country that conducts the games, and outstanding sportsmen will take part in the torch relay.

According to plans, all the athletes will gather in Almaty, in the heart of the Universiade and participate in the opening ceremony. As a sporting event, Universiade attracts more and more young people, said the organisers.

"It is important that young people will be able to communicate and get to know each other as part of this project. We want to show that our

students are talented, creative and strong," said Winter Universiade Organising Directorate Head Nail Nurov.

The 28th World Winter Universiade committee determined the torch relay route in regional centres.

"The regional headquarters completed work on the torch relay route in regional centres Dec. 22. Now all 16 cities taking part in the relay are decided as well attractions, which will be involved at every stage," according to the organisation's press release.

The flame will cover a distance of more than 22,500 kilometres and 200

kilometres in the hands of torchbearers. Air Astana, official airline of the student games will transmit the flame from the regions to Almaty where on Jan. 29 the official opening of the Universiade will be held.

"The concept of Universiade 2017 is unique. The organisers divided the project into 16 separate parts and enabled each region to adapt it for themselves. We now have 16 routes which differ from each other, but they are part of a whole. The Universiade torch relay will expand the geography from one city to the whole country," Nurov said.

The distance of the route in each

regional centre varies from 10 to 12 kilometres so that each torchbearer will run about 200 metres. One hundred people will carry the torch in Almaty on a route length of 20 kilometres. The flame will begin its journey at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and visit major sports facilities, including Shymbulak, Medeo Ice Rink and Baluan Sholak Palace, educational centres, major attractions and finish at the Almaty Arena stadium during the opening ceremony.

Regions throughout Kazakhstan are preparing for the festive events. For example, the torch relay in the Karaganda region will be divided into

two stages: the first will take place in Temirtau and the second stage will be held in Karaganda. The Temirtau city bowl will contain the fire from blast furnace of smelter and coal from the region's mines.

Thus, the relay will demonstrate the best features of the regions. Students, athletes and young scientists will unite to carry the Universiade torch. The relay is set to draw people's attention to the upcoming major sporting event and encourage more people to visit Almaty during the Universiade.

One-hundred-forty torches were produced for the games in a minimalist style. They were made by an Australian company that has been working with the Olympic movement since 2000.

Cheerleading Gains Pace as Official Kazakh Sports Activity

By Kamila Zhumabayeva

ASTANA – When someone mentions cheerleading, girls from squads in American pop culture are first thing to come into one's head. Kazakhstan has its very own cheerleading federation, with teams representing the country and leading to its complete development.

Having originated in the U.S., cheerleading is a multifaceted sport that incorporates claps, jumps, dancing, stunting, acrobatics, gymnastics and other elements of physical activity.

Squads are commonly seen at American football, basketball and other games to motivate the team and entertain the fans. Cheerleaders perform during competitions and time-outs, with the one to three-minute routines meant to encourage the audience to cheer for

the team. Some squads also participate in cheerleading competitions.

With time, cheerleading began being cultivated as a way of supporting teams and an independent sports activity in other countries including Russia and Kazakhstan. The latter sanctioned cheerleading as official sports activity in 2012.

The cheerleading federation, officially registered in 2007, was founded by Alfiya Sainova, the first coach and now federation vice president. Athletes were being trained as early as 2002.

Under her leadership, the country's cheerleaders participated for the first time at the world championship in Bremen, Germany, in 2009. Teams continue to perform at international championships.

Various levels of competition based on age categories and status as amateur or professional are usually held according to certain rules.

Some data suggests that the number of individuals involved in the sport worldwide exceeds six million, according to the country's National Federation of Cheerleading.

Compared to the U.S., where cheerleading is popular and mainstream, physical activity at schools and colleges in Kazakhstan is still continuing to gain pace as an official sports activity.

"We don't have such a tendency yet. We tried to introduce cheerleading into regular school programmes, but new developments seemed difficult for their teaching staff in terms of teaching new skills to children and many other matters," National Federation of Cheerleading jury board member and chairperson Galina Zverkova said in her interview with The Astana Times.

An activity similar in technique to cheerleading existed in the country before the Great Patri-

otic War. Groups of athletes used to present "acrobatic etudes" and march with slogans at sports parades, theatrical performances and other public events.

The Kazakh Cheerleading Federation entered the IFC (International Federation of Cheerleading) and AFC (Asian Federation of Cheerleading) in August 2007.

Almaty, Karaganda, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Pavlodar, Taldykorgan, Aktobe, Uralsk, Almaty and Astana regions belong to the national cheerleading federation squad, which has more than 200 coaches and 5,000 participants.

"Our cheerleading teams are in higher education facilities across Kazakhstan's five regions and currently about two or three colleges in Almaty. We have a large coaching staff and participants in Karaganda and Taldykorgan, lately in Ust-Kamenogorsk and a little

less in Aktobe and Pavlodar," said Zverkova.

"We hold championships, festivals and many other events every year. The 10th championship will take place soon," she added.

Sports categories are assigned for achievements during the competitions. Teams participate in world, Asian and European championships.

Cheerleading requires good physical training, artistic traits, willpower and leadership. Training programmes, publications and seminars are available to educate and train all juniors. Training cheerleaders sometimes takes more time than coaching the athletes they cheer for, according to cheerleading.kz. In professional sports, the squads are often represented by sports teams.

Individuals from kindergarten through adults can be involved

in cheerleading. Athletes up to 45 years old may participate in world championships.

In Kazakhstan, children can begin cheerleading from ages three-six. Teams have members up to age 20. Kids are basically participating because they start training in schools.

Cheerleading is still a new development in the country and the federation has been holding many events such as seminars, training camps and practical trainings at schools and universities. Sometimes, coaches from other countries are invited to conduct workshops for such events.

"We have a prospect for growth. We don't leave children after they perform one dance or participate in one competition. We assign skill categories according to competition results and so on," said Zverkova.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Winter Charity Ball Raises More Than \$60,640 for Children with Special Needs

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – The Winter Charity Ball, held traditionally in the Radisson Hotel Astana, is an enchanting event that brings together capital residents empathetic toward social problems affecting children. Bolashak Corporate Fund, with the support of the hotel and major companies, hosted the ninth annual ball Dec. 22 and raised more than 20 million tenge (US\$60,640).

“Every year we welcome more than 250 guests who make donations and receive charity ball tickets. In turn, we try to surprise and please them by offering a raffle game and an auction of sport items belonging to famous Kazakh athletes and pieces of art,” Bolashak Corporate Fund project manager Assem Issabekova told The Astana Times.

The Radisson initiated the tradition of holding the Winter Charity Ball in 2008 by organising charity dinners. In 2012, the Bolashak



Fund joined the hotel and started coordinating the process.

“We are the main partner and

co-organiser of the Winter Charity Ball. This festive charity evening is one of the major events held

in Astana ahead of the New Year holidays. This magic evening involves major sponsors that are contributing to fundraising efforts of the organisers. Recently, we also held the ninth annual Christmas Charity Bazaar. These two events are held in sequence every year with a common charitable purpose,” Radisson Hotel Astana sales department director Zhuldyz Akhmetova told the paper.

Tatarstan Honoured Artist Guzel Haybulina directed this year’s ball. The guests enjoyed the performances of Astana Opera soloists and the Kazakh Armed Forces Symphonic Orchestra led by Kassym Aitpayev.

Thirty-four debutants traditionally open the ball demonstrating the classic waltz and feisty samba. Beautiful girls in white dresses and tiaras danced with eligible bachelors, creating a fascinating atmosphere.

“I have always dreamed of being a part of this magical evening and becoming a princess. After the audition, I realised it is not just a ball,

but also new contacts and a large friendly team and, most importantly, a systematic charity. I am glad that I was able to contribute to the development of philanthropy and to be here,” said debutante Makpal Kusayin.

The auction featured a great selection of sports equipment, including Vincenzo Nibali’s bike which he rode to win cycling’s most prestigious award, an autographed hockey jersey from Barys Club and the authentic gloves of the world’s unbeaten boxer Genady Golovkin that were sold for two million tenge (US\$6,064). Guests were able to buy porcelain made specifically for the 1980 Olympic Games, an interesting picture presented by the Kulanshi Art Centre and paintings by artists Leyla Mahat and Naira Tumanyan.

All monies raised will be directed to support two major fund projects: Proezdnye granty (Travel Grants) and Kazhdyi Rebenok Dostoin Shkoly (Every child deserves a school). The latter aims to develop an inclusive model

to teach children with autism in educational institutions. Bolashak Fund also supports talented youth by providing travel grants to participate in international contests, Olympiads and sports competitions.

“At the moment, we have opened six offices to support inclusive education and cabinets of psychological-pedagogical correction in Almaty and Astana. In 2016, the fund has received more than 200 complaints on discrimination against differently-abled children. This means that we need to solve this social problem by opening more offices. We also have made some proposals to legislative projects of the country in terms of inclusive education development. The fate of children with special needs enrolled in schools has changed. When we see a child attending classes at schools and communicating with their peers, it becomes clear that the efforts of the fund are not in vain. They bring great results,” said Issabekova.

Kazakhstan’s Largest Tuberculosis Treatment Centre Opens in Astana

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – A new, state-of-the-art tuberculosis treatment centre opened Dec. 29 in Astana.

The centre is the largest in the country and is designed for up to 500 patients, including a 12-bed intensive care unit. It will be serviced by more than 1,000 personnel. The treatment complex consists of four-to-six-story buildings

in nine sections and had been under construction since 2008. The centre has clinical, diagnostic and bacteriological laboratories as well as computer tomography, X-ray equipment and video capabilities for online meetings with domestic and foreign physicians.

“It has been our dream to build the most modern complex in the country,” said the centre’s lead physician Rauza Zhussupova in an interview with local media.

The centre’s rooms can accommodate two patients and the complex is designed to separate hospitalisation, both bacillary and non-bacillary, which helps contain the tuberculosis.

According to astana.gov.kz, the number of tuberculosis cases has decreased four times in the capital since 2008 when there were 218 patients. Today, there are 58 cases.

Astana Akim (Mayor) Asshet Issekeshiev attended the an-

nouncement and noted the scale of the facility. He also recently held an informal meeting with key staff, who have designated priority issues, such as personnel, housing and transport from other cities.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) reports conducted in Kazakhstan last year, in general over the past 10 years, cases of tuberculosis in the country decreased 2.2 times, while the



mortality decreased five times. Kazakhstan has been introducing various innovative methods of diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis based on international standards.

Some 1.9 million tenge (US\$3,000) per year on average is allocated for the treatment of one patient with a severe form of tuberculosis.

‘City Within a City’ – New MEGA Silk Way to Open in 2017

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – MEGA Silk Way, the capital’s new shopping and entertainment centre located at the EXPO 2017 site, was launched in December. The official opening is planned for the first quarter of 2017.

The complex is completely ready and tenants are preparing for the opening. Mega Centre Management Communication Department representative Takhmina Kibirova told The Astana Times.

“The total area of the new mall is about 140,000 square metres. The length is about 500 metres and width is about 160 metres, while the height of the atriums is 25 metres, which makes it almost the same level as an eight-story building,” according to the management.

British company Chapman Taylor, which has completed more than 2,000 large-scale retail projects in 90 countries, is the architect.

“The building of MEGA Silk Way harmoniously fits into the existing style of the architectural ensemble of the international ex-

hibition EXPO 2017,” noted the press release.

The mall is based on the concept of “a city within a city” with its own streets and art objects. The estimated attendance at the shopping centre is one million visitors a month, and this figure is expected to rise to two million during the exhibition.

The complex has rented 205 premises, according to company management. To date, 88 tenants have signed agreements, 10 percent are negotiating and 2 percent remain available.

The new mall will represent more than 20 Kazakh companies, including large and well-known ones in Astana and Almaty such as Happyton (amusement and entertainment parks for children), Marwin (kid’s stores), Evrikum (interactive informative and amusement park of wonders), Chaplin (cinema), Technodom (household appliances) and Mimioriki (children’s clothes). Local brands include QLP, Cosmo Style, Altyn Alan, Kazyna-Gold, Empire, Mini City and KazTour.

In addition to Happyton and Evrikum, the mall will also have a Kango trampoline centre and

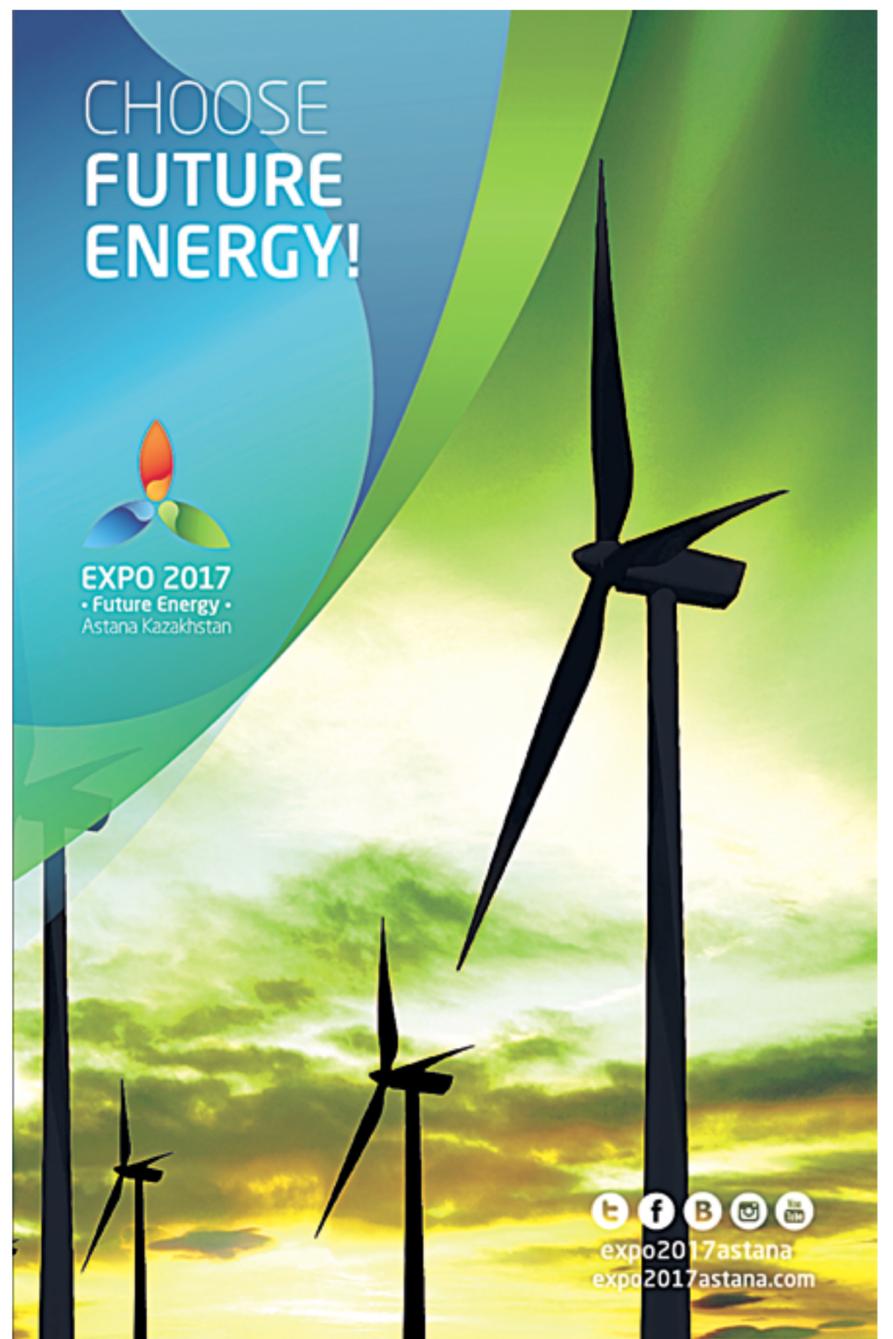
Mega Ice, an 800-square-metre ice rink. Guests will be able to enjoy the largest screen in Astana in the 11-hall Chaplin cinema.

International retailers have been paying attention to the project, noted the management. In 2017, Swedish clothier H&M will launch its store with a trading area of 2,545 square metres. Inditex, one of the world’s biggest retailers with its brands Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Pull&Bear and Oysho, will occupy 8,000 square metres.

MEGA Silk Way will also have a unique platform, an innovative laboratory where young professionals in the information system and technology fields will be able to develop and test their projects.

The new complex is expected to create more than 2,000 jobs, and including service companies, an excess of 5,000 people will be employed. The annual tax payments to the budget are projected to be about 5 billion tenge (US\$15 million).

Approximately 67 billion tenge (US\$201.7 million) was invested into MEGA Silk Way, 70 percent of which are loans and 30 percent from the company’s own funds.



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