



## Fifth Congress of Religious Leaders Calls to End Distrust, Strengthen Dialogue



President Nursultan Nazarbayev (C) with participants in the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana.

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – The fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana completed its work on June 11 with the adoption of a final political and religious declaration based on proposals made by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev during his opening address to the gathering.

The final declaration includes calls for “political leaders of world powers to stop the growing abyss of distrust in the world today, to end mutual sanctions and to use the mechanisms of the United Nations and other international organisations to overcome the divisions and restore peace and security in accordance with international

law,” and for “media owners and publishers to cease using their media outlets, including web-based ones, as a tool to incite religious and sectarian divisions, reminding them of their moral responsibility and to advise that they spread a culture of peace, accord and respect among religions, peoples and nations,” among other exhortations for conflicts to be ceased, for dialogue to be continued, for joint efforts against extremism and other declarations.

The event drew religious leaders from Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Zoroastrian traditions from more than 40 countries, as well as political leaders such as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, President of Finland

Sauli Niinistö and King Abdullah II of Jordan, who addressed the opening and the closing plenary sessions of the congress.

The theme of the congress was “Dialogue of Religious Leaders and Politicians for Peace and Development,” and it included sessions on subjects such as “Religious and Political Leaders: Responsibility to Humanity,” “The Influence of Religion on Youth: Education, Science, Culture and the Media,” “Religion and Politics: New Trends and Prospects,” “Dialogue Based on Mutual Respect and Understanding between the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions for the Sake of Peace, Security and Harmony.”

In opening the congress, President Nazarbayev called inclusive dialogue crucial to progress. “[Dialogue] should be based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and recognition of each other’s interests, cooperation, tolerance and mutual understanding,” he said. “In the 21st century, an alternative to dialogue in all fields – political, economic, cultural, and spiritual – does not exist. Today, humanity has great material, scientific, technical and intellectual capabilities. No progress will [be achieved] if people do not learn to live in peace and spiritual harmony with each other,” the President said.

Kazakhstan itself was offered as an example of harmony as the

event opened. “We have shown the world that the fatal inevitability of conflict of religions and cultures does not exist in our society,” the President said. “Therefore, they can be avoided at any level of international politics. We have demonstrated that tolerant attitudes within society are the question of conscious responsibility of the state and religious organisations, and ordinary citizens.”

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in the Roman Curia, echoed the sentiment when he called Kazakhstan an example of a society that remains secular yet respects religious differences.

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## Kazakhstan Finalises Terms for Accession to WTO

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – After nearly 20 years of negotiations, Kazakhstan finalised on June 10 terms for the country to accede to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

“I congratulate WTO members and the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the historic step taken today to conclude the accession negotiations of Kazakhstan and finalise its WTO accession package. I look forward to welcoming Kazakhstan to the WTO,” said WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo following the meeting with the Working Party on Kazakhstan’s accession, during which the terms were reached, according to information released by the organisation.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev spoke to the people of Kazakhstan in a televised address in connection with the completion of accession negotiations on June 22, telling them the Working Party had met in Geneva earlier that day and Kazakhstan’s bid had been formally and finally approved. He called the event “historic” and said Kazakhstan was to become the 162nd member of the global trade organisation.

“WTO membership opens up new horizons for our economy. This ensures that our companies have access to foreign markets and gives customers access to a large selection of goods and services. Today 90 percent of our bilateral trade is with WTO member-states.

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## IAEA Board Approves Agreement on Housing LEU Bank in Kazakhstan

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – The Board of Governors of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) approved a host-state agreement on June 12 between the agency and the government of Kazakhstan on hosting an international low-enriched uranium (LEU) fuel bank in the country, an offer Kazakhstan first made in 2010, according to an IAEA announcement on the same day. The board also approved a transit agreement with Russia on moving nuclear materials through its territory.

The bank is intended to assure countries with peaceful nuclear programmes of a ready supply of

LEU in case they cannot access it on the commercial market or otherwise. It is intended to provide IAEA member states with confidence in a steady and predictable supply of fuel even if other supply mechanisms are disrupted, the IAEA announcement explained. However, a key principle of the bank is that it must not distort the commercial market, and it does not affect the rights of IAEA member states to develop their own nuclear fuel cycle facilities, the IAEA said. Member states wishing to purchase LEU from the IAEA LEU bank will need to have a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement in force with the agency, among other criteria.

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## Ban Ki-moon Visits Kazakhstan, Promotes Stronger Cooperation

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev met United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in Astana’s Palace of Peace and Harmony on June 10 to discuss the work of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Reli-

gions and other ways of cooperation.

Nazarbayev noted that the participation of the UN secretary-general in the Congress, which has been taking place in the purpose-built Palace of Peace and Harmony since 2006, seriously increases the significance of the event.

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## Day of Kazakhstan’s Pavilion at EXPO 2015 to be Held in Milan

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

MILAN – The world exposition EXPO Milano 2015 opened in Italy in early May and will last for six months.

EXPO Milano 2015 examines human history through the lens of two aspects of food production: traditional cultural values and the use of new technologies, its organisers say. They expect up to 20 million visitors during the half-year event will be open.

Kazakhstan’s pavilion is one of the most popular among expo guests, and more than 4,500 peo-

ple visit it daily. While waiting in line to enter the pavilion, visitors have a chance to observe Kazakh art through performances by Kazakh artist.

The National Day of Kazakhstan is expected to be held on June 27 in front of the Expo Centre, with an official ceremony to be attended by President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The Kazakh delegation will be welcomed with a flag-raising ceremony and, as usual, by the national anthems of Kazakhstan and Italy. After the ceremony, the President is set to visit Kazakhstan’s pavil-

ion and a business forum that is being held on the initiative of Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Investment and Development.

The outside of Kazakhstan’s pavilion evokes wheat, which is one of the country’s main agricultural crops. Inside the pavilion are six zones dedicated to agriculture, livestock, aquaculture, environment, arable farming and surprising facts about Kazakhstan. To engage visitors, interactive and multimedia technologies are widely used in the expositions.

All the guests are offered kumys, a national drink of fermented

mare’s milk, and given an opportunity to take a selfie with the pavilion’s equipment. A restaurant has been opened at the pavilion for people to try Kazakh food.

“The next expo event will take place in Astana in 2017. Kazakhstan’s pavilion serves as one of the main attractions of Expo 2015, as well as demonstrates the country’s readiness to host such a large event in 2017,” General Commissioner of the National Pavilion of Kazakhstan Anuarbek Mussin said.

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## Astana Arlans Win Second WSB Title



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# Kazakh President Awards Diplomas to First Graduates of Nazarbayev University

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – Very few people have the pleasure of awarding diplomas to the graduates of the university named in their honour. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev had that opportunity June 15 as he participated in the presentation of sheepskins to the first 446 students to complete their bachelor studies at Nazarbayev University.

The ceremony began with words of gratitude from the President to the university staff and parents of the soon-to-be alumni.

“The first graduates of the flagship of higher education, first scientific and educational centre at the international level in our history, are about to become part of the working society of Kazakhstan. Our country gets a new generation of young, fully-trained, skilled professionals. This is especially important now when we are about to start the deep transformation based on the Plan of the Nation of the modernisation of the country,” he said.

The university will provide knowledge, scientific discoveries and innovations to Kazakhstan’s economy and life, Nazarbayev added. The President believes the graduates will expand awareness about the nation through their professionalism, patriotism and leadership.

At the end of his speech, Nazarbayev noted thousands of students were also getting their diplomas from other schools throughout the country. He noted that UNICEF ranks Kazakhstan 27th in the Global Youth Development Index, a higher position



President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev gives a diploma to a Nazarbayev University graduate on June 15.

than countries such as France, Sweden and Turkey.

“Everything we do today, we do for you and your future. Today, doors to the whole world are open for you. You live in an interesting period of time and grow along with the country. This is a result of peace and stability in our society. Therefore, your main mission is to strengthen the unity and harmony in the country. I wish you all peace and farewell,” said Nazarbayev.

President of the university Shigeo Katsu and Kazakh Minister of Education and Science Aslan Sarinzhapov also congratulated the alumni on the historic occasion.

“We are proud of you! You are our first ever graduates. You are the representatives of the new era of higher education in Kazakhstan. You are not only intelligent but brave, because you have begun to learn in a com-

pletely new climate of teaching and research,” said Katsu, who has served at the university since its formation.

Established in 2010 at the initiative of the President, Nazarbayev University aims to become the first world-class university and research centre in Kazakhstan. Its activities are associated with the implementation of the main priorities of the country, including the development of advanced

research capacity, innovation in technology and industry and the transition to a system of education that meets the demands of a changing and globally-integrated economy.

The academic process is based on international educational standards, which contributes to the advancement of the Kazakh education system and takes it to the international level. It is the first university in Kazakhstan committed to working in accordance with those standards and guided by the principles of autonomy and academic freedom.

In the last five years, the total number of students has increased to 2,800 in seven schools. Grants are awarded annually to 500 student applicants who receive the highest scores on an exam administered by the university. The students’ living costs for the duration of their study are covered by the state educational grant.

The greatest numbers of students are trained at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as the School of Science and Technology, the School of Engineering, the Graduate School of Education, the Graduate School of Public Policy and the Graduate School of Business. Among the popular specialties are computer science, mechanical engineering, robotics and mechatronics, education management, biological sciences, electrical and electronic engineering and construction engineering.

Commencement was attended by students, their parents and teaching staff, managers of large national companies and other guests.

## Fifth Congress of Religious Leaders Calls to End Distrust, Strengthen Dialogue

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“The fact that we are here represents a feature which is in Kazakhstan, and I think people who come from all over the world try to copy the model of Kazakhstan’s friendship and harmony. ... I think more and more countries will follow the example of Kazakhstan, to learn from it,” said Yeshaya Cohen, chief rabbi of Kazakhstan and chair of the Council of Rabbis of Europe and Asia, in his opening remarks, Kazakh TV reported.

In his speech to the plenary session, Nazarbayev commented on the congress’s fundamental role: to be a force for peace, particularly in violent times. “A distinctive feature of this forum is to discuss the relationship of religions and cultures in the interests of peace and stability on the planet,” he said. “The relevance of such a discussion is enhanced by the disturbing development of the global situation. Today, the world is literally hanging in a dangerous state of uncertainty.”

The UN secretary-general, addressing the congress, commented on the role of religion in “a world in transition.” With urbanisation and migration rising and a need for equitable development, the global security landscape is in a state of flux, he said.

“We face enormous opportunities. We are the first generation that can end global poverty and the last generation that can address global warming before it is too late. But we also face enormous risks,” Ban said. “Civil conflicts, terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking and health crises threaten millions of people. These dangers transcend national borders. ... Religious leaders – traditional and non-traditional – have a pivotal role to play. In times of turmoil, religious leaders can provide a values-based glue

to hold communities together and provide common ground for peace-making and problem solving.”

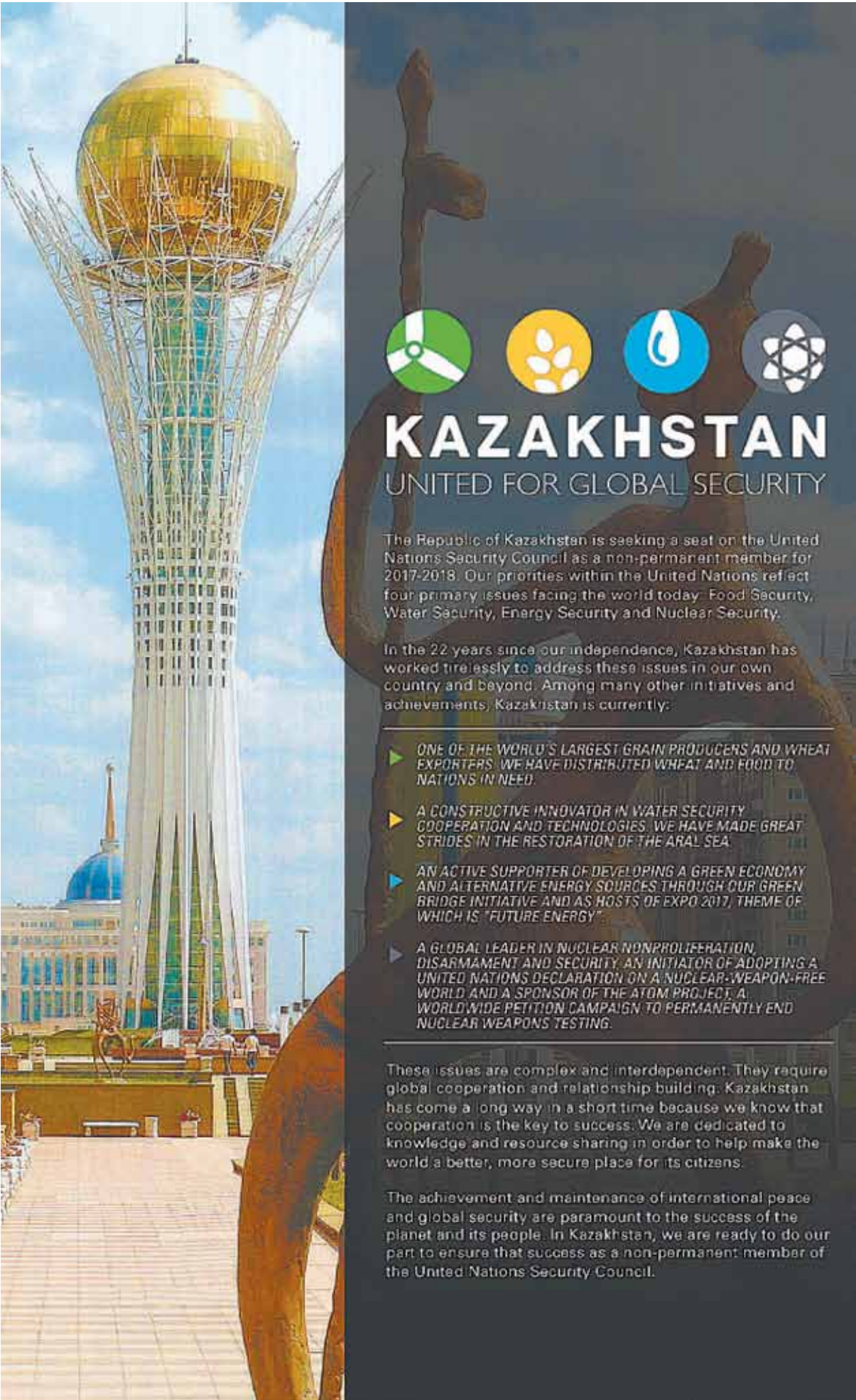
They also have an obligation to speak out when so-called adherents of their faith commit crimes in its name, he said.

While participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity for discussion, there were also acknowledgements that the dialogue needs to be brought from the world of religion to the world of politics. At a press briefing on June 10, head of the World Forum of Islamic Schools of Thought Ayatolla Mohsen Araki of Iran said the conference was useful for suggesting solutions to solve problems between religions.

However, he noted, “the real problem is politics, it is not religious. ... Politicians have to do something to solve the problems in Syria, in Iraq, in Yemen. ... The most important thing is that politicians, especially the politicians in superpowers, don’t have a very strong will to solve the problem. They benefit from this problem in our region. They benefit from the clash ... between different religions,” he said.

The congress was strong on prevention, with many condemnations of violence. Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia Mufti Ravil Gaynutdin said young people should be prevented from being seduced by terrorism. “[Young people] should be educated in a spirit of tolerance and respect among religions and peoples. ... Religious leaders must not take weapons and go to the mountains to fight terrorism. Our weapon is the holy book,” he said.

When asked about rehabilitation of terrorists, however, he said that it was national, secular agencies that bore the responsibility for rehabilitating terrorist recruits.



### NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

The United Arab Emirates postal service and KazPost have issued stamps dedicated to the heads of the two friendly states: President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev and President of the UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. A presentation ceremony for the new stamps was held on June 9 in Dubai.

Kazakhstan has confirmed that, so far, 27 countries and four international organisations will participate in EXPO 2017 in Astana, Expo National Commissioner and First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Rapol Zhoshybayev announced in Paris on June 10, Kazinform reports. Zhoshybayev was taking part in the 157th session of the General Assembly of the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE), where reports on preparations for expos in Astana in 2017 and Dubai in 2020, as well as a horticultural exhibition in Antalya 2016, were presented.

An international crew of astronauts comprising a Russian, an American and an Italian woman astronaut who set a record for flight time in space by a woman landed safely in Kazakhstan on June 11 after being delayed because of the April failure of a Russian Soyuz rocket, after which launches and returns were postponed for an investigation. The Expedition 43 trio, Commander Terry Virts of NASA and Flight Engineers Anton Shkaplerov of the Russian Federal Space Agency and Samantha Cristoforetti of the European Space Agency were delayed in returning by nearly a month, leading to Cristoforetti’s record. The three landed near the remote town of Dzhezkazgan.

Kazakhstan will stop offering free lunches at secondary schools in the new school year, instead switching to more targeted assistance programmes, Radio Free Europe reports. The Almaty city administration said the money will instead be used to pay for lunches for orphans and children from low-income families. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev spoke about needing to cancel free lunch programmes in February, when discussing measures to be taken to avoid an economic crisis with his cabinet.

Talgat Yermegiyev has been relieved of his position as chairman of the Board of Astana EXPO 2017 National Company, Tengrinews reported on June 12. Today.kz reported the following day that Yermegiyev had been placed under house arrest on suspicion of embezzling more than \$1 million of state funds set aside for the event. Yermegiyev has chaired the company, which is managing preparations for the exposition, since 2013. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev appointed Akim (Mayor) of Astana Adilbek Zhaksybekov as the new chairman of the board of Astana EXPO 2017 National Company.

A two-day regional workshop on combating cybercrime was held in Almaty on June 11-12. The event was co-organised by the Strategic Police Matters Unit of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the OSCE programme office in Astana, in coordination with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Some 45 law-enforcement officers specialising in cybercrime investigations from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan took part in the event. Experts from Belarus, Russia, Turkey, the United States and the UNODC shared their experience with participants, including in the use of special units and cross-border exchanges of information. Participants discussed challenges in combating cybercrime and reviewed training opportunities and training modules, recruitment policies, data collection, budget allocation and logistics. They explored ways to enhance coordination among law-enforcement agencies, governmental structures, the private sector, academia and nongovernmental organisations. They also examined specific cybercrime cases and techniques used by investigative and forensic units. The workshop is part of the OSCE’s activities in combating transnational threats, money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the abuse of the Internet for criminal purposes.



# EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

## EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

President Nursultan Nazarbayev has signed the law “On Ratification of the Agreement between Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic on confidence building measures in the border area,” which will increase co-operation on military, customs and law enforcement issues, as well as in other spheres. The countries will now agree on the geographic scope, timing and composition of military and special exercises; notify each other of large-scale military activities and troop movements; establish close contacts between military border agencies, special services staff and customs and law enforcement agencies along the border; and implement confidence building measures, according to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security of the Mazhilis of Kazakhstan. The neighbours will also cooperate on border stability, fighting illegal activities and notifying each other of natural disasters.

King Abdullah II of Jordan met Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov in Astana on June 11 to discuss the latest developments in the region. Both parties stressed the need to promote bilateral ties and to build on existing agreements, Jordan’s Petra News Agency reported. They also discussed counter-terrorism efforts and more general work to support peace and security in the Middle East. Massimov noted that Kazakhstan is very interested in investment from Jordan.

Members of the Belarusian National Assembly met with the Astana EXPO 2017 Company and confirmed their interest in participating in infrastructure projects that are part of preparations for the event as well as part of larger regional development programmes, the Belarusian News reports, citing the press service of Belarus’s House of Representatives. The meeting came during the June 15-18 official visit of a Belarusian parliamentary delegation to Kazakhstan. Chairman of the House of Representatives of Belarus Vladimir Andreichenko met Chairman of the Senate of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during the visit to discuss trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation, as well as strengthening inter-regional cooperation and the interaction between Belarusian and Kazakh MPs in international parliamentary organisations. An agreement on cooperation signed between the House of Representatives of Belarus and the Mazhilis (lower chamber of Parliament) of Kazakhstan is expected to open new avenues of cooperation.

Kazakhstan and the United States should strengthen bilateral military cooperation, says U.S. Army Central Command Sergeant Major Ronnie Kelley, Tengrinews reports. Kelley made the remarks at a press conference in Astana on June 11, following a conference with non-commissioned officers of Kazakhstan’s Armed Forces. The sergeant major said that military matters offered “a great opportunity for cooperation” between the two countries, and “the more we work as a team, the more we cooperate, the stronger we will be.” Kelley also praised the level of training of Kazakhstan’s soldiers and said that the country was moving in the right direction. Kelley also noted that Command Sergeant Major Temirbek Khalykov of Kazakhstan’s armed forces, who was the first Kazakh to graduate from the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, had recently been added to the Hall of Fame of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy as one of its best graduates.

President of the Mitzvah Association of Jewish National Organisations of Kazakhstan and member of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK) Alexander Baron visited Washington on June 10, meeting U.S. State Department Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Ira Forman and members of the U.S. Congress and briefing them on the APK, Jewish life in Kazakhstan and other religious issues. Baron also participated in a round-table discussion which included the presentation of the book, “The History of People’s Memory,” dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the APK and the 70th anniversary of victory in World War II, which discusses the history of Jewish communities in Central Asia.

## Qatari Foreign Minister Visits Astana, Nazarbayev’s Fall Visit Discussed

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – Trade, economic, investment, transit and transport cooperation were discussed between Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid Bin Mohammed Al Attiyah on June 17 during the latter’s official visit to Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev commended the high level of relations between the two nations.

“I am confident your visit will bring our cooperation to a higher level. Qatar has greatly contributed to the construction of our capital, Astana, especially [by financing the construction of the] Nur Astana mosque,” he said.

The head of state also thanked the Qatari side for its assistance regarding the planned construction of a rehabilitation centre for victims of Soviet nuclear tests in Semey. The project is being implemented within the framework of cooperation between the Nazarbayev Foundation for Culture, Education and Social Programmes and the Qatar Development Fund.

In turn, Al Attiyah conveyed the greetings of Emir of Qatar



Foreign Minister of Qatar Khalid Bin Mohammed Al Attiyah (L) and President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev meet in Astana on June 17.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to the President and expressed hope for the further strengthening of the nations’ bilateral partnership.

Al Attiyah met the same day with Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, where they discussed the prospects of deepening political dialogue and increasing trade, economic and cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

Special attention was paid to implementing the agreements reached during Emir Tamim’s visit in 2014, including creating a Kazakhstan and Qatar joint investment fund and opening a direct air route between the two states. In addition, one of the main aims of Al Attiyah’s trip to Astana was preparation for Nazarbayev’s upcoming visit to Qatar this fall.

“We are grateful for the inten-

tion of Emir Al Thani to fund the building of a school in Astana. The Akimat of Astana and the Qatar Development Fund have already started work on it,” said Idrissov.

“Qatar and Kazakhstan enjoy good, friendly relations. Qatar sees great potential in terms of developing investment cooperation with Kazakhstan,” Al Attiyah said at a joint press briefing with

Idrissov following their talks. “We are focusing on mutual cooperation whether it is agriculture, energy or aviation.”

The foreign minister noted he has appreciated each of his visits to the nation.

“Every time I come to Kazakhstan I learn something new in your country. It is very dynamic and changing, which is good to see,” Al Attiyah said.

During the meeting, they exchanged views on topical international issues including the situation in the Middle East, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, as well as the Ukrainian crisis, as reported by the Kazakh Foreign Ministry. The counterparts underlined that only the collective efforts of all interested sides can help solve the problems.

“Kazakhstan and Qatar are not only peace loving, but also peace-making countries,” said Al Attiyah.

The two ministers also positively assessed mutual cooperation within international and regional organisations such as the United Nations (UN), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

## Ban Ki-moon Visits Kazakhstan, Promotes Stronger Cooperation



Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Erlan Idrissov (L) and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon open the new UN building in Astana.

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“In spite of your busyness, especially in light of the difficult period in the economy, politics, inter-confessional issues, as well as preparation for the 70th anniversary of the UN, you came to our country. In addition, you supported our initiative on the closure of the nuclear test site, which is celebrated on Aug. 29 as the International Day against Nuclear Tests. We believe that through forums like this one, Kazakhstan contributes to the establishment of peace in the world,” he said.

In turn, Ban thanked Nazarbayev for the invitation to take part in the event, which brought together leaders of world religions.

“I would like to pay tribute to your vision and initiative to assemble this congress, which is really important in current times. You came up with this initiative 12 years ago, when the situation was radically different from the present. Today, when the whole world is suffering from religious extremism and terrorism, it is necessary that the voices of religious leaders that are calling to confront the hatred have been heard,” he said, as quoted by the presidential press service.

Following the meeting with the President, Ban and Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov attended the opening ceremony of a new UN building in Astana.

The building was renovated by the government of Kazakhstan.

“It is a great honour and privilege for me to carry out two important events today – first of all, I was

very much privileged to open this new, very excellent United Nations House. This should be our common working place, and I would like to sincerely thank the government and people of Kazakhstan for their strong support for the United Nations,” Ban said.

Kazakhstan intends to continue supporting the United Nations, Idrissov said, noting the decision to allocate another building in Almaty for the needs of UN international agencies. Like the building in Astana, located on the bank of the Yessil River, the building in Almaty is situated in one of the most picturesque areas of the city and has a total area of 20,000 square metres. At the moment, construction and repair works are underway. When they are finished, the building will be transferred to the UN. Kazakhstan hopes the move will advance the issue of creating a UN regional diplomacy hub in Almaty, much like the ones in Istanbul and Bangkok.

“Kazakhstan is known for its championing role as a leading country in this region and also a global leader. The country has been promoting, as one of the leaders, nuclear nonproliferation, as well as peace-building in a variety of conflicts, including in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan and many other places,” the UN secretary-general said.

“Kazakhstan has helped advance a global conversation between religious and political leaders about promoting tolerance and the universal right to freedom of religion and beliefs. I strongly believe that

religious leaders have a critical role to play. This was also the subject of a United Nations General Assembly high-level meeting which I convened in late April for the same purpose,” he added.

During the event, President of Al Farabi Kazakh National University Galimkair Mutanov presented to Ban an honorary doctorate degree from the university for his contribution to peace and mutual understanding in the international arena.

Ban noted that he perceives it as a sign of respect to the whole system of the UN and its staff around the world, who are working tirelessly, day and night, for world peace and democracy and human rights, even under very difficult and dangerous circumstances.

“You are one of the oldest universities in Central Asia and I will do my best to preserve that kind of honour and legacy of your university. I know that you are celebrating 80 years [since you were founded]; for the United Nations, this is the 70th [anniversary] – you are 10 years older than the United Nations! We are similar in age and share a similar mission to build bridges of understanding and cooperation and global citizenry,” he said.

“Many centuries ago, your namesake Al Farabi wrote that it is impossible to achieve one’s goals in isolation. It can only be done by joining with others and now I am joining with your university, I am joining with the people of Kazakhstan, and that is the spirit in which I accept this honour,” Ban concluded.

## OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Praises Kazakh Social Development Efforts

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

ASTANA – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) Astrid Thors travelled to Astana to participate in a conference dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK).

During her visit, she held a meeting on June 15 with Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov where they discussed the state and prospects of cooperation between her office and the nation.

Idrissov underlined that the trip provided Thors with an opportunity to receive up-to-date information about the country’s achievements in building a tolerant and multicultural society and identify new opportunities to enhance the activities of the OSCE programme office in Kazakhstan. He noted the country has managed to successfully confront the financial crisis, join the 50 most competitive economies in the world and build its own model of socio-economic development.

“The results of these efforts helped to launch the Kazakhstan 2050 development strategy and the Nurly Zhol economic programme, the main aim of which is to get to the 30 developed countries in the world,” he said.

The foreign minister noted the atmosphere of tolerance and harmony in Kazakhstan has become the hallmark of the country. The progress in socio-economic development was achieved thanks to interethnic peace and religious harmony, the top priorities of President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s policy.

Idrissov added that the key feature of Kazakhstan’s policy is the understanding of the term “tolerance” not only as “tolerance toward others,” but as “tolerance plus,” including respect for others and ensuring mutual enrichment from peaceful co-existence and development on this basis.

In turn, Thors said she appreciated the steps the Kazakh government is taking to further ensure economic and social development, as well as measures to modernise the country, including the implementation of the five institutional reforms and 100 concrete steps of the Plan of the Nation. She stressed that today the stability of international relations and friendship are as impor-

tant as ever for the OSCE. She also noted the importance of the fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions on June 10-11 in strengthening the atmosphere of dialogue at the international level.

The two sides noted the importance of keeping the policy of interethnic consent in Kazakhstan, as well as an exchange of experience with OSCE in this sensitive area.

The same day, Thors met in the Kazakh National Library with Deputy Chairman and Head of the APK Secretariat Yerally Tugzhanov. He reported on the implementation of the national action plan on organisation and holding the Year of the APK. They also exchanged views on further development of the state’s ethnic policy.

According to the official OSCE website, the HCNM becomes involved in a situation if, in her judgement, there are tensions involving national minorities which could develop into a conflict. Much of the day-to-day work is in identifying and addressing causes of ethnic tensions and conflicts. The high commissioner addresses the short-term triggers of interethnic tension or conflict and long-term structural concerns. If a participating state is not meeting its political commitments or international norms, she will assist by providing analysis and recommendations. Based on experience, the HCNM publishes thematic recommendations and guidelines that give advice on common challenges and best practices. The high commissioner also provides structural support through small collaborative projects that aim to achieve sustainability through increasing local ownership.

A native of Finland, Thors began her mandate on August 20, 2013. She was a member of Finnish Parliament from 2004–2013, served as Minister of Migration and European Affairs (2007–2011) and was a member of the European Parliament (1996–2004).

The HCNM’s mandate states that the high commissioner should be an eminent international personality with long-standing relevant experience from whom an impartial performance of the function may be expected. The mandate draws heavily on the judgement, experience and political and diplomatic sense of the appointed person. As such, the acquired reputation and personal traits of the high commissioner are vitally important.



# ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

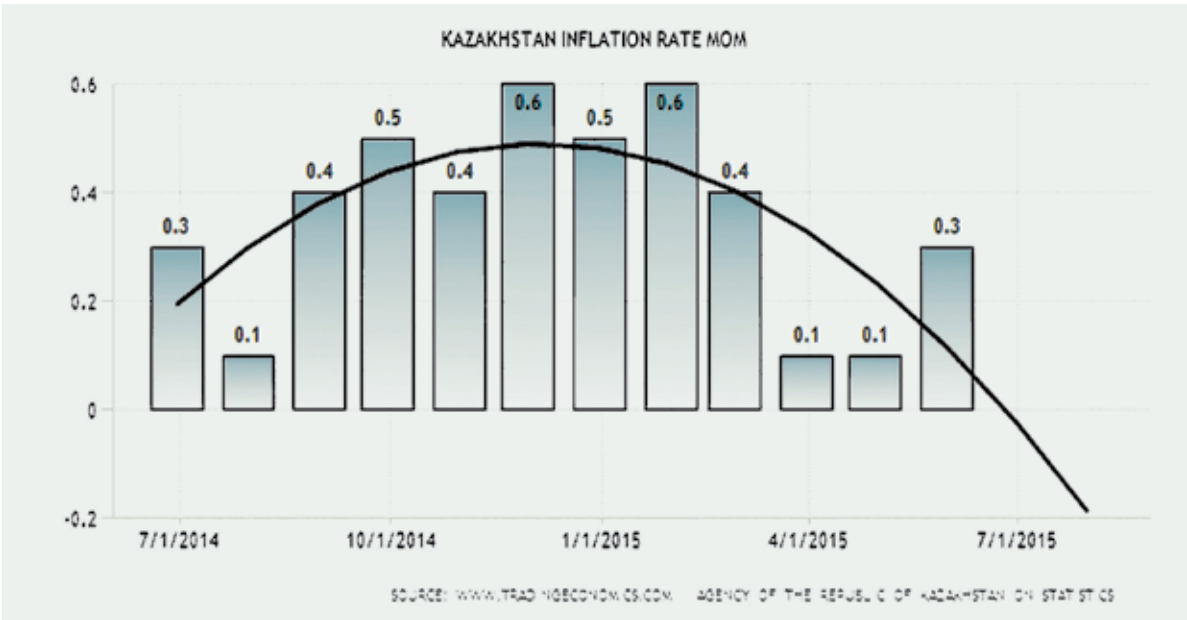
## National Bank Chief Notes Inflation Decrease

By Shynar Ospanova

The head of the National Bank of Kazakhstan Kairat Kelimbetov reported during a recent plenary session of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan that inflation in the country has decreased.

“Annual inflation in 2014 was 7.4 percent. The inflation rate in May 2015 was at the level of 0.3 percent, while at the beginning of the year it was 1.5 percent. As the consequence of the reduction of inflation, the price of non-food items has been reduced, mainly due to imported goods from neighbouring countries,” said Kelimbetov.

In general, according to the head of the bank, the prices on the domestic consumer market remain sta-



ble and the volume of money supply can be characterised as relative to the observed economic growth.

“Concerning exchange rates as of June 1, the official exchange rate of the bank amounted to 185 tenge for \$1. Currently, the bank continues to hold the exchange rate policy aimed at preventing sharp jumps and short-term volatility of exchange rates,” explained Kelimbetov.

In addition, the head of the bank spoke about the country’s international reserves. At the end of May, gross international reserves of the National Bank amounted to \$28.7 billion. International reserves, including National Fund assets in foreign currency, amounted to \$97.8 billion.

### ECONOMY NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan’s giant Kashagan oil field is aiming for an output of 370,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) in its first phase of production, which it hopes to launch by the end of 2017 after repeated delays, Rigzone reported on June 9. The field, the biggest oil find in decades, first began production in September 2013 but halted after only a few weeks when it was found that pipes were leaking in the North Caspian operation. The North Caspian Operating Company (NCOC) developing the oilfield started replacing the pipelines this year and output is expected to resume in the second half of 2016, according to NCOC representatives. Output of 90,000 bpd is expected for the first few months before rising to 90,000 bpd, then 180,000 bpd and finally 370,000 bpd. Kazakhstan is second only to Russia for oil production in the former Soviet Union. Crude oil production fell to 80.8 million tonnes last year from a peak of 81.7 million tonnes in 2013. Output is not expected to exceed 80.5 million tonnes this year.

Kazakhstan has seen a slight drop in the price of real estate, KazakhTV reported on June 13. The press service of the Committee on Statistics of the Kazakh Ministry of National Economy reported a 1.4 percent decrease in real estate prices in May, compared to the previous month. Rent prices increased by 0.3 percent. Prices in the housing market are monitored in Astana, Almaty and regional centres.

The government of Kazakhstan has signed a five-year, \$88 million loan agreement with the World Bank to foster productive innovation in Kazakhstan, The Financial reported on June 9. The project will be implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science and is intended to promote high-quality, nationally relevant research and technology commercialisation. It aims to improve Kazakhstan’s capacity for innovation and quality of scientific research institutes, and increase company spending on research and development and university-industry collaboration in research and development. The loan will finance competitive grants to groups developing commercially viable research and ideas and help domestic research institutes and other relevant entities upgrade their facilities. The total project cost is \$110 million, with \$22 million coming from the government of Kazakhstan. It will be launched once it is ratified by Kazakhstan’s Parliament.

Kazakhstan has bumped its metallurgical production by 15.6 percent in the first five months of 2015 as compared to last year, Azer News reports, citing First Deputy Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev speaking at the International Astana Mining & Metallurgy Congress on June 17. The results are due to the first five-year plan of industrialisation in the mining and metallurgy industries, he said, saying the country had invested \$2.5 billion in the programme, put 60 new factories into operation and created more than 16,000 permanent jobs. Another six projects are planned for this year, Sagintayev said. He also said the country plans to increase titanium and coal production and to begin producing methane by 2017.

The Korea Asset Management Corporation (KAMCO) held a policy advisory meeting at Kazakhstan’s National Bank on June 16-17 as part of the Knowledge Sharing Programme led by Korea’s Ministry of Strategy & Finance, Business Korea reports. The conference was intended to help Kazakh banks improve the quality of their assets and strengthen the country’s financial market in general by disposing of nonperforming loans, a major problem in Kazakhstan. KAMCO had been conducting research in the country through an agreement with Kazakhstan’s National Bank; the results were shared at the meeting. KAMCO mentioned restructuring insolvent financial institutions, expanding the scope of debt undertaking by the National Bank’s Fund of Problem Loans, establishing a bad debt evaluation system using data on court auctions and real estate prices and enacting laws for financial market restructuring.

## India, Kazakhstan Explore Mining, Energy Projects in Advance of Indian PM’s Visit

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – India and Kazakhstan are looking at a variety of mining, mineral and oil and gas projects, paving the way for bilateral agreements to be signed during Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi’s visit to the country early in July.

An inter-ministerial working group has been established among the Coal, Steel and Mines Ministries of India and coordinating with the External Affairs Ministry and the prime minister’s office, Mining Weekly reported on June 18. The joint projects taking shape may include iron ore, coal and potash exploration, as well as joint ventures with government support to either expand existing cooperative endeavours or set up new projects at known mineral assets.

It is expected that at least two or three agreements on coal and potash, among other agreements, will be signed, the report said. India currently imports about 5 million tonnes of potash a year, the report said.

India’s government-owned National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) Limited is expected to lead India’s side of the joint ventures, according to Mining Weekly.

A Kazakh delegation led by Minister of Investment and Development of Kazakhstan Asset Issekeshiev met with Union Minister of Steel and Mines Narendra Singh Tomar on June 15, ahead of the June 17 meeting of the India-Kazakhstan Inter-governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical, Industrial and Cultural Cooperation. “This government is proactive to col-

laborate with governments and industries abroad to foster mutual growth and industrial development, and we look forward to further economic partnership with Kazakhstan,” Tomar said, according to a report by Kitco News on June 15.

Two further announcements were made following the commission meeting, on investment in exploration and transit.

On June 17, Udaipur Kiran reported that ONGC Videsh Limited, a branch of the state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India (ONGC) would invest \$400 million in exploration activities in Kazakhstan. The money will be used to support exploration in India’s Satpayev block in Kazakhstan’s oil-rich North Caspian region, ONGC Videsh Managing Director Narendra Kumar Verma said.

“While we have a 25 percent stake in the block, we will be funding the entire exploration activities. The company has already invested \$150 million in the block. We have also committed to invest up to \$400 million over there,” Verma said, according to the report. It will also pay \$80 million to KazMunayGas as a one-time assignment fee. Exploratory drilling is expected to begin next month.

OVL paid \$13 million as a signing amount for a 25 percent stake in Satpayev in 2011.

The countries are also looking at possibilities for transporting raw materials. Also on June 17, Oil Minister of India Dharmendra Pradhan announced that the country would conduct a feasibility study on importing crude oil and gas from Kazakhstan either through a pipeline or as liquid natural gas in ships. Hydrocarbons

could be brought first to Iran via the Caspian Sea and transported across the country through a pipeline.

“With the opening of the rail link between Iran-Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, we will explore the possibility of this route being developed as a linked corridor to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC),” Pradhan said after the commission meeting.

A Joint Working Group is to be established to find transport and logistics linkages.

“We also reviewed developments in trade and investment. It was decided that we would work together within the framework of the Joint Study group to consider the feasibility of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union, of which Kazakhstan is a member,” Pradhan said.

## Kazakhstan Finalises Terms for Accession to WTO

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Therefore, this decision is very important for us.”

“Kazakhstan is becoming more attractive for both foreign and domestic investors. We get the opportunity to create new industries and jobs,” Nazarbayev said.

“During the 19 years of the negotiation process, our government and experts have worked hard, defending favourable conditions for us. We have agreed on positions on the most sensitive issues for our economy, which include, among others, support for our the agriculture sector ... the negotiation process was challenging for us due to subsidy-reducing requirements, but we defended our positions, as well as the markets of financial services and telecommunications. In addition, we have managed to combine the requirements of the WTO and the EAEU, based on our national interests.”

The President emphasised the advantages of being a WTO member-state. “Accession to the WTO is a victory for the whole country, and recognition of Kazakhstan as an integral part of the global economic system. Symbolically, the doors have swung open in front of our country at a time when we started to implement the five institutional reforms. The standards of the WTO coincide with the spirit of the reforms: transparency, efficiency, competitiveness.”

He also explained that “After joining the WTO, we will not give up supporting domestic enterprises. Now, support measures provided by the state must comply with international rules. At the same time, Kazakh enterprises must learn to compete under WTO rules. I’ve been talking about it, and now is the time when we have to compete with other countries, not only within the EAEU, but on the scale of the WTO ... As I have always warned, along with reaping the benefits of joining

the organisation, the competition [for our country] will also intensify. All producers have to catch up [and grow] to the world level.”

The Working Party consists of 43 members of the WTO, 30 of which have initiated bilateral market access negotiations with Kazakhstan. So far, Kazakhstan has signed protocols on completion of bilateral negotiations with 26 countries.

The draft accession package will now be presented for approval to members of the Working Party WTO member. The draft Schedule of Concessions and Commitments on Goods, the draft Schedule of Specific Commitments on Trade in Services and Kazakhstan’s Accession Package will be forwarded to the WTO General Council for formal adoption by all 161 WTO members, the WTO website reported.

Chair of the Working Party meeting, Finnish Ambassador Vesa Himanen, has called the talks “one of the most challenging negotiations in the 20-year history of the organisation.” The challenge was Kazakhstan’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and its tariff adjustment. The Kazakh delegation at the talks was led by Minister for Economic Integration Zhanar Aitzhanova. Kazakhstan started its process of accession to the WTO in 1996. The Kazakh Ministry of Economic Development and Trade has been the government’s coordinating body for its WTO session negotiations. Over the last several years, Kazakhstan made significant progress in pursuing both bilateral and multilateral negotiations on WTO accession and currently is at the final stage of the accession process.

Accession to the WTO is one of the major priorities of the government’s policy to integrate into the world economy by enhancing competitiveness, diversifying the national economy and contributing to global economic welfare.





# BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

## BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

The Startup Nomad Tour, a campaign organised to hold business classes and select the best start-ups in cities across Central Asia, launched in Astana, BNews reported on June 22. The tour will go to Karaganda, Tashkent, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Kyzylorda and Taraz and end in Almaty to coincide with the Global Entrepreneurship Conference on Nov. 19-20. The three best projects will be selected in Almaty. The tour has been organised by Kazakhstan’s Club of Young Entrepreneurs. In classes on the tour, executives and business speakers will share experiences and experts will explain effective technologies and business tools.

A business and commercial centre called “Astana” is to be built in St. Petersburg starting later this year, Tengrinews reports. A ceremony to lay the foundation of the centre took place on May 17. In 2014, the St. Petersburg Business Centre opened in Astana.

A draft of proposed uniform rules for development in Kazakhstan was presented in the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs (NCE) on June 18, Tengrinews reported. The fundamental purpose of the new rules is to reduce the time required for developers, according to the NCE. The new rules establish uniform regulations regarding architecture, urban planning and construction activities in the country, from design to commissioning, including mechanisms for allocating land and obtaining permits. Implementing some provisions of the draft rules would require amendments to some legislative acts, including the Land Code and the law “On architectural, urban planning and construction activities.”

Five companies from Kazakhstan are presenting their products at an exhibition in Moscow celebrating the 20th anniversary of the RosUpack International Exhibition of the Packaging Industry, the Central Communications Service reports. Neftehim, the Corrugated Packaging Plant, AiBM, Intellservice and Novopek are taking part in the event with the support of Kaznex Invest. “Exports of packaging products in Kazakhstan in 2014 amounted to \$25 million, which is 35.7 percent higher than in 2013. To Russia alone, we supplied \$6.3 million worth of such products,” said representative of the Service for Export Promotion of Kaznex Invest Vyacheslav Lyubarets. At the end of the exhibition, a number of contracts between Kazakh and foreign companies are expected to be signed. Novopek representative Serik Keruenbayev noted that his company’s products are attracting a lot of interest.

Chairman of the State Revenue Committee of Kazakhstan Daulet Yergozhin announced on his Facebook page that the country had established a Customs Electronic Data Interchange with China, Tengrinews reports. This is good news for Kazakh businesses that trade with China, he said, according to the report. Now data about dates, volumes and prices of trade can be processed electronically, he said. The interchange is expected to help the two countries generate statistical data more easily and combat smuggling.

Trade in the Khorgos Special Economic Zone is up by some 90 percent this year compared to last year, CRI English reports, and passenger flow through the cross-border cooperation centre has doubled to about 1 million people. Much of the increase is due to infrastructure investment in the area, Nie Yongle of the Khorgos Merchants Group said, according to the report. “The airport in Yining, which is the capital of the Ili Kazakh prefecture, is now being enlarged. At the same time, the expressway between Lianyungang and Khorgos has been opened up, and the construction of another expressway linking Khorgos and Almaty is underway. Once it’s done, it will be a highway network linking China with Central Asia and Europe.” A cross-border passenger train service is set to open in July.

## Almaty Hosts 12th IFSB Summit, Country Aims to Become Islamic Finance Centre

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – The Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) held its 12th summit in Almaty on May 18, the first time the summit was held in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Kazakh TV reported in late May. As Kazakhstan aims to become a regional financial centre, the country hopes to position Almaty as the Islamic finance hub of Central Asia and the CIS.

“We expect Kazakhstan to become one of the leading countries in the Islamic financial services industry,” said Kairat Kelimbetov, chairman of the National Bank of Kazakhstan, addressing the summit. Kelimbetov noted that Kazakhstan joined the IFSB in 2011. “The opening of the Islamic banks on the CIS territory and the issuance of sukuk [Islamic bonds] – all these have been highly viewed by the Islamic finance community,” he said.

Opening the summit online, Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov said Islamic finance is one of the fastest growing areas in global finance, Kazinform reported. Participation in the IFSB gives Kazakhstan effective support in enhancing the standards for Islamic financial institutions in the coun-



Participants at the Islamic Financial Services Board Summit in Almaty on May 18.

try, thereby strengthening Kazakhstan’s position as a regional leader in this field, Kelimbetov said. “The global industry of Islamic finance should expand beyond its traditional boundaries to maintain double-digit growth rates, and in this regard, Kazakhstan has become an

important partner as a gateway to Central Asia and the CIS,” he said.

Kazakhstan is currently working on amending legislation to let the Kazakh Ministry of Finance place these types of securities on the stock exchange. The process is expected to roll out over the next 1.5 years.

The volume of bonds placement will depend on the government budget balance, Kelimbetov said. Deputy Chairman of the National Bank Nurlan Kussainov said that Islamic deposits have been defined in the country’s new law on Islamic finance, and that a memorandum

of understanding had been signed with the organisation that deals with the development of mini markets for Islamic instruments.

Though Islamic financial institutions are already operating in Kazakhstan and the Development Bank of Kazakhstan was the first in the CIS to issue sukuk bonds, participants noted that a lot of work will need to be done before Kazakhstan can become a leader in Islamic finance. “We have had productive discussions with the chairman of the National Bank of Kazakhstan,” said Secretary-General of the IFSB Jaseem Ahmed, according to Kazakh TV. “Previously, we provided assistance both to the National Bank and the banking sector. And we would welcome a stronger role by the National Bank of Kazakhstan in the framework of IFSB in the future. Therefore, there is so much to be done. And I think we will do it.”

The Islamic Financial Services Board is an international body that sets the standards of the Islamic financial services industry. The Almaty summit was organised with the support of the National Bank of Kazakhstan and intended to help identify the main principles of sustainable development of Islamic finance and its integration into the global economic system.

## SMEs Should Not Fear End of Audit Moratorium, Says Finance Ministry Official

By Meruyert Nurgazinova

The recent end to a moratorium on audits of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will not result in increased tax scrutiny on those businesses, according to comments by the Chairman of the State Revenue Committee of the Kazakh Ministry of Finance Daulet Yergozhin during a briefing of the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs on June 12.

“Payment of taxes is not of a punitive nature. Currently, timing inspections are mainly conducted. Tax inspections will be carried out only for a narrow circle of institutions. To

date, their number in Almaty is not more than 200 companies. Throughout the country the number does not exceed 1,200 totalling less than 1 percent out of 1,200,000 taxpayers in the country. So the actions are planned and there will not be any pressure on business,” Yergozhin said.

In addition, Atameken Chairman Ablai Myrzakhetmetov has noted taxpayers “engaged in wholesale [or] retail sales of gasoline (except for aviation fuel), diesel fuel, alcoholic beverages” should use control-cash machines (CCM), which have data latching and (or) transmission function functions. The regulation requiring use of the machines comes into effect July 1.

Also during the briefing, the issue of tax filers concealing income and commodities was discussed. However, as it was noted at the briefing, most of the Kazakh businessmen fulfill their tax obligations.

“Every entrepreneur seeks to maximise income, profit. But by an open dialogue we will improve the tax culture and tax collection by means of explaining,” Yergozhin said.

“In the near future, we will provide information about the tax burden by the industries, as well as on the profitability of the companies ... in order to be able to have a more detailed analysis of each industry and say what actions are required,” he added.

## Western China – Western Europe Highway to Become Toll Road

Staff Report

The Western Europe-Western China highway will become a paid toll road after 2016, according to the Otyrar.kz news agency. The revenue will be used to pay for road maintenance and construction.

According to Mukhtar Duisenbekov, director of the South Kazakhstan regional branch of the KazAvtoZhol national company, the toll amounts will vary depending on vehicle class and weight. Charges will be higher for passenger and freight transport vehicles than for cars.

“For one kilometre, road drivers of passenger cars will pay about 1

tenge (approximately half a cent). For 200 tenge (US\$1.10) you can drive up to 160 kilometres. A separate tariff will be introduced for passenger cars. However, it would be more profitable to pay a monthly fee, of 5,000 tenge (US\$27),” said Duysenbekov.

The South Kazakhstan region includes 224 kilometres of the Western Europe-Western China highway. At present, construction continues between Shymkent and Taraz, and Shymkent and Tashkent. It is planned to put those sections into operation by 2022. About 600 toll stations will be established on the road after its completion.

## Kazakhstan Seeks to Boost Grain Exports to Saudi Arabia

By Julia Rutz

Kazakhstan is planning to increase the supply of grain to Saudi Arabia, the press service of the Kazakh Ministry of Agriculture reported recently. The decision was made after representatives of Saudi Arabia suggested at a May business forum that Kazakhstan provide a preferential grain regime to Saudi Arabia.

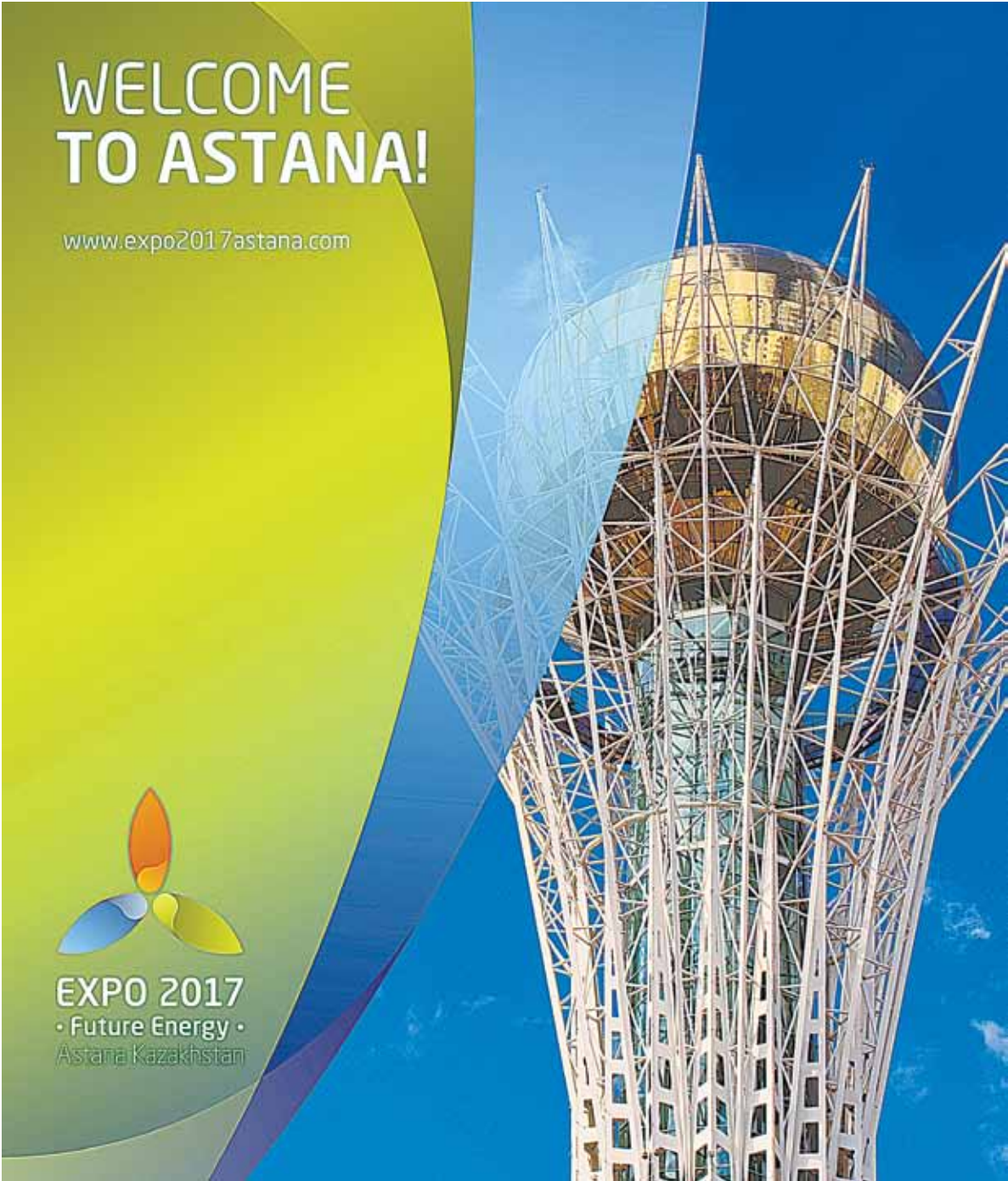
The suggestion was made by the Chairman of the Council of Chambers of Commerce of Saudi Arabia Abdulrahman al-Zamir, who also noted the high quality of grain produced in Kazakhstan.

“The completion of the new railway line Uzen-Gorgan connecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran makes it possible to increase the volume of grain export transit through the territory of Iran to the Persian Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia. In case of interest, there is a possibility of delivery of Kazakh grain to the Saudi Arabian market on mutually beneficial terms soon,” noted a Ministry of Agriculture representative, according to LS magazine.

The ministry has also empha-

sised high transportation costs from Kazakhstan to Saudi Arabia as one of the major problems that hampers the growth of export and trade development. According to the ministry, the average annual wheat production in Saudi Arabia is about 1 million tons. Imports of grain are about 2 million tonnes per year. In addition, the country imports about 8 million tons of barley every year.

The main suppliers of grain to Saudi Arabia are Russia, Ukraine, E.U. countries, Australia and the United States. According to statistics compiled by the LS financial agency, from 2010-2014 Saudi Arabia imported 68,000 tonnes of Kazakh grain costing \$10 million. “We have an agreement with the Minister of Trade and Industry of Saudi Arabia Taufik al-Rabia concerning our cooperation with Saudi businessmen to establish either an Islamic bank or a fund that could finance such projects. Moreover, we have a common partner, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which finances different trading operations and investment projects,” concluded Minister of Investments and Development Asset Issekeshiev.





EDITORIALS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

Almaty Olympic Bid Remains Strong Going into Final Weeks

The beauty and excitement of sport is that the favourite does not always win. Many of our most magical sporting memories are of upsets when the underdog overcomes the odds to succeed.

But when analysed, there are often signs of why the surprise occurred. The outsider may have had overlooked strengths or the favourite weaknesses which made the result less certain. As the race to host the 2022 Winter Olympics enters its last month, there are now signs it may not be the foregone conclusion many predicted.

When the bidding process began two years ago, Almaty was seen very much as the rank outsider among the cities wanting to host the games. Even when the contest became just a two-horse race between Beijing and Kazakhstan’s largest city in the foothills of the Tien Shan mountains, the Chinese capital was considered the red-hot favourite.

But it is a mark of just what a good case Almaty has put together and the hard work that has gone into presenting it that few now think there can only be one winner. Following the behind-closed-doors technical presentation of the two bids in Lausanne, Switzerland, earlier in June, Olympic chiefs from across the world said how impressed they were with the strength of Almaty’s case and predicted a close vote on July 31.

Canadian IOC (International Olympic Committee) member Dick Pound told the AP he was “very, very agreeably surprised” by Almaty’s presentation. Australian Vice President John Coates forecast “a close vote which I didn’t think originally.” U.S. Olympic Committee Chairman Larry Probst said the Almaty team “drove home the message ‘keeping it real.’ That was all about snow versus making snow. I think that resonates.”

It is this contrast which will be on the minds of those who will take part in the secret vote in Kuala Lumpur at the end of July. Beijing may be a great world city and hosted a highly successful Summer Olympics in 2008. But it is also a city – and a country – without much of a tradition of winter sports and where not just the venues but the snow would have to be produced from scratch.

Almaty could, and did, present a very different case. IOC members heard about a city cradled by snow-covered mountains where winter sports were very much part of the local culture.

It meant that nine of the 13 games venues – like the world famous Medeo skating rink – already exist, with all of them within a 30-kilometre radius of the city. To underline the contrast with the problems its rival will have in producing snow-covered slopes, IOC Vice President Craig Reedie joked that Almaty made good use of “pictures of people climbing through three feet of snow.”

Beijing talked rightly about the success of the 2008 Summer Olympics and the legacy use of its venues. But Almaty pointed in turn to having hosted the 2011 Asian Winter Games and staging the Winter Universiade – the largest winter sports event outside the Olympics itself – in two years’ time. There will be plenty of experience in Kazakhstan of the meticulous planning and hard work needed to make a major sporting event a success.

IOC members will also have on their minds the Olympic movement’s commitment to stage less-extravagant games in the future following the estimated \$40 billion spent on Beijing and \$50 billion on Sochi. It is this cost which scared off many of the original candidates.

Against this measure, Almaty also has an advantage. The use of existing venues means not just a compact event with travel between accommodations and events reduced for athletes, officials and spectators – another of the IOC’s wishes – but that the cost will be far more manageable. In fact, the AP said Almaty’s budget for infrastructure and operations is around half the \$5 billion cost of the high-speed rail link needed between Beijing and its new skiing and bobsled venues. As its article reminded readers, that’s not counting the financial – and environmental – cost of creating slopes of artificial snow.

Staging any Olympics is, of course, a major and complex event. It needs total commitment not just from the host city but also the host country. It was why it was important that the IOC technical committee heard in person from Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov, who was in Lausanne, and from President Nursultan Nazarbayev by video message, about the government’s full support for the Almaty bid.

This included financial guarantees, if needed, from the country’s \$75 billion National Fund. It also helped underline the role that a 2022 games would play in Kazakhstan’s wider ambitions to both drive economic growth and increase the country’s attractiveness as a winter sports destination for visitors from near and far.

Kazakhstan’s astonishing natural beauty is one of the country’s greatest so-far-undiscovered assets. A Winter Olympics would put the global spotlight on what not just winter sports enthusiasts but leisure visitors of all kinds can enjoy within our large borders.

Beijing remains, of course, a very strong bid, but as we have learned many times, the outcome in sports is never guaranteed. The last few weeks have shown just how far Almaty has come in the race to host the 2022 games because of the appeal of a “real” games. The momentum is with Almaty. Whether it is enough to close the gap in the closing weeks, we will learn on July 31.

Skopje, Astana Poised to Move Relations to New Level

By Yulia Mager

In an exclusive interview with this newspaper, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia Nikola Poposki, who is scheduled to visit Astana on July 1, discussed the current state and the future of bilateral relations.

*This year we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our countries. How can you assess the level of cooperation between Macedonia and Kazakhstan, as well as their roles in an international arena?*

On June 1, we marked exactly 20 years since that great day for our two countries. Over the past two decades, bilateral relations between our two governments and nations have been characterised by friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation. I am convinced that this is precisely how it will remain in the future, too, seeing as both countries are to this very day demonstrating a concrete interest and a sincere desire for further expanding and strengthening their relations.

Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has grown into a major geopolitical player, both in Central Asia and beyond, remaining active in a number of political developments and processes taking place within the international arena and, particularly, within the global and regional organisations shaping the world’s multilateral setting. The voice of Kazakhstan is ever more increasingly being heard across today’s multipolar world. At the same time, the country has evolved into an economic giant, enjoying extraordinary economic growth over these past two decades and being able to project its economic power onto literally every part of the world. The very fact that Kazakhstan is among the 20 most attractive investment destinations in the world provides the best testament to your economic potential and the glowing image that Kazakhstan has enjoyed within the world’s elite business circles.

The Republic of Macedonia, on its turn, is one of the countries which gained their independence with the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991. With a population of 2 million, as well as a far smaller territory and fewer resources than Kazakhstan, over these 25 years, it has nevertheless managed to find its own place under the sun. In all those years, I feel that Macedonia has managed to grow into a respected and principle-observing entity within international relations, as well as a worthy partner of a great number of other countries throughout the world. With our country being located at the heart of the turbulent Balkan region, we Macedonians are especially proud of the fact that, starting from the position of consumer, over the years we have successfully transformed into a producer of security. Today, the Republic of Macedonia is a modern European country and candidate for EU and NATO membership, boasting a functioning market economy as well as a liberal democracy, an excellent business climate and a serious influx of foreign direct investment. Foreign nationals see our country as a land of great natural beauty, as well as a cradle of culture and an ancient land and people that have always fought proudly for their independence and sovereignty. Seen from that aspect, we share a great number of similarities with your country and people.

*During the visit of the Macedonian President to Kazakhstan in 2012, the two countries agreed to strengthen cooperation in the political, economic and cultural contexts. What has been done since 2012 to meet the provisions of that agreement?*

Yes, that visit was the initial spark that led to our cooperation taking an upward turn over the last few years. Within the political context, after 2012, a number of prime-ministerial and ministerial visits and meetings took place in Kazakhstan and across the world. What seems to be lacking, and what Macedonia very much desires, is to see a Kazakh official of high rank finally pay a visit to our country in the foreseeable future. I sincerely hope that this year or next, Macedonia will have the honour of playing host to your esteemed President, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

With regard to the economy, I am glad that one of the key agreements signed during President [Gjorge] Ivanov’s visit to Kazakhstan in 2012, the Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation between the two countries, has recently entered into force after being ratified by Macedonia, and the Agreement on the Encouragement and Mutual Protection of Investments is soon to follow suit. Furthermore, we expect that the two countries’ Joint Commission on Cooperation will soon launch the implementation of the third of these bilateral agreements signed in 2012, the Agreement on Commercial and Economic Cooperation.

When it comes to our cooperation in the context of culture, the first memorandum of cooperation between two major national institutions in our two countries, Astana Opera and the Macedonian Opera and Ballet, has already been signed, and Kazakh artists are taking part in various festivals across the Republic of Macedonia as we speak, heralding an increase in the level of cooperation

that the two countries have been enjoying in that area, as well.

On a personal level, I believe that by joining our forces and working in concert with each other, we can achieve a lot more in all these areas and we will be investing the utmost of our efforts into doing precisely that in the coming period.

*Could you outline the course that cooperation between Macedonia and Kazakhstan might take?*

What I feel is of vital importance to the bilateral relations between Macedonia and Kazakhstan at this juncture is the opening of the Macedonian Embassy in Astana in November 2014 and the accreditation of Ilija Psaltirov as the first Macedonian Ambassador resident in Kazakhstan. That very act offers the best proof of our country’s sincere intention of raising its relations with Kazakhstan to a much higher level than the existing one, as well as of its plans of continuing to raise them steadily and quickly to even greater heights over the months and years ahead. In that context, I would like to voice my gratitude to both my Kazakh colleagues and to the people of Kazakhstan as a whole for graciously offering their warm hospitality to Macedonia and affording it a very warm reception into their beautiful country, which, to me, is a testament to their own serious dedication to writing a new chapter in the development of bilateral relations between our two countries.

As can further be attested by all relevant indicators testifying to the quality of their economic growth, development and overall performances, Kazakhstan and Macedonia are leading the way and are at the top of the scale in their respective regions. Both countries have proven to be attractive destinations for foreign investors, offering them a variety of incentives should they indeed decide to choose them as the location of their next investment. Both countries are vital spots on the geopolitical maps of their respective regions and I would even say beyond. All this speaks enough of the potentials that the two countries possess, as well as of the opportunity that Macedonia on one hand opens to Kazakh companies in terms of using it as a doorway for entering the ... huge European market, and the one that Kazakhstan offers to Macedonian companies for entering the Central Asian market on the other.

I would like to particularly emphasise that we can already boast the first Kazakh investment in the Republic of Macedonia. It has come in the shape of a company working in the field of consultancy, but is keen and planning on expanding the scope of its operations to other industries, as well. On the other hand, several Macedonian companies have been present in the Kazakh market for a number of years and we expect that the overall number of companies from both countries deciding to take their investments in the opposite direction will continue growing in the coming period, too.

Your country also played host to the first Macedonian-Kazakh business fora which, aside from relevant ministers from the two countries’ governments, were attended by a great number of representatives of the Kazakh business community, being held last month in Almaty and Astana as a collaborative effort between the Macedonian Embassy in Astana and the first Kazakh-Macedonian cooperation association, KAZ-MAC. Having been recently established at the initiative of Macedonian Ambassador in Astana Ilija Psaltirov, the primary objective of this association is to both establish and foster as close ties as possible between the two countries by furthering their cooperation in a multitude of different areas such as culture, economy, science, education, medicine, tourism, sport and many others.

All this provides a solid foundation for the way in which our cooperation in the future is going to unfold. The framework has now been designed, crafted and fitted; what the painting it will hold is going to look like depends in equal measure on both Kazakhstan and Macedonia. In that context, I see my visit to Astana as an introduction into the second stage in the development of our relations, the basic features of which are establishing new, specific and tangible forms of cooperation that will be able to produce both concrete and visible results.

*What types of issues will you be discussing with your hosts during your visit to Kazakhstan?*

Over the course of my visit, I will be discussing a broad range of issues with my Kazakh hosts, focusing, in essence, on all areas in which actual progress can be made at any level, be it political, economic or cultural. Seeing as there was a lack of concrete and real cooperation between the two countries for a great number of years, on this occasion, we are determined to make progress in as many areas as possible.

We wish to use the very momentum that has been created by those numerous political contacts that the most senior officials of our two countries have had over the last five to six years, which I mentioned and listed above.

In Astana, the emphasis will be placed on the potential avenues in which our two countries could expand their business cooperation in the coming period or, to be more precise, we will introduce



Nikola Poposki

representatives of the Kazakh business community and Kazakh authorities to the investment conditions and plethora of opportunities that Macedonia has to offer. We are hopeful that our presentation will lead to an increase in the number of Kazakh companies deciding to invest in Macedonia, as well as to a growth in the overall volume of trade between the two countries, especially when considering that there are indeed Macedonian businessmen who are interested in investing and doing business in Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, something that is equally important to us is to have a chance to present the enormous tourism potential of the Republic of Macedonia. Several groups of Kazakh tourists already intend to pay a visit to our country this summer, which provides an excellent signal and a welcome impetus for the future.

It is vital for our two countries to mutually abolish their visa regimes for each other’s nationals, which will allow both businesspersons and tourists to maintain easier and faster contacts in the future. The Republic of Macedonia already abolished on a unilateral basis its visa requirement for Kazakhstan nationals quite a number of years ago and I am hopeful that this unilateral act by my country will be reciprocated by Kazakhstan as soon as possible, taking into consideration that this issue is of paramount importance when it comes to the future intensification of the cooperation between our two countries in all areas and contexts.

Simultaneously, we will be diversifying the overall existing contractual framework between our two countries with the signing of several more key agreements and memoranda of cooperation, a trend that we wish to see continued in the future as well, particularly when considering that having a solid contractual framework is of crucial importance for channelling cooperation between any two countries.

At the same time, I am interested to learn how the Eurasian Economic Union operates and how it is developing its economic relations with countries that do not form part of its membership. I will also be exchanging my views with my hosts on a variety of major developments currently dominating the media the world over and, finally, I will also be updating my colleagues on the on-going state of affairs in the corner of the world where Macedonia is located.

*In Kazakhstan, 2015 is the year of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, an instrument created to guarantee the unity of the country’s multicultural society. As a foreign observer, how do you assess the experience of Kazakhstan in shaping interethnic and interreligious relations worldwide? Is Macedonia interested in this mechanism?*

I am impressed by the fact that there are around 130 ethnic communities, as well as several different religious groups, coexisting in today’s Kazakhstan. That only goes to show that you have devised the right formula for unity, coexistence and economic and social prosperity in your country.

Macedonia is also a country in which different ethnic communities coexist. We have even officially listed all separate ethnic groups under their full names within the country’s national constitution and each of them enjoys its own rights under it.

Fostering interethnic and interreligious relations and ties is of paramount importance to the stability of not only ours, but your country, as well. Hence, I feel that promoting mutual respect and understanding in a multicultural society has an exceptional bearing on its overall prosperity. Differences should be connecting people, rather than setting them apart and dividing them on various grounds. That is why I would like to offer Kazakhstan, its leaders and its people my congratulations on this year dedicated to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, and offer at the same time my felicitations upon the great jubilee of 550 years since the foundation of the first Khanate, which has been the cornerstone of today’s Kazakhstan’s statehood.

THE ASTANA TIMES

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Publisher: Svezhaya Pressa LLP  
News and Editorial: dlee@astanatimes.com  
Advertising: +7 727 252 08 82  
Inquiries: info@astanatimes.com  
KazPost Subscription index: 64572

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The Astana Times is printed at “Media Holding “ERNUR” LLP, 30 Sileti Street, Astana.

The Astana Times is published since November 2010. The Astana Times is re-registered by the Ministry of Communications and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan under the registration No. 14037-G of 20 December 2013.  
The newspaper is typed and made into pages at the computer centre of “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda”. Published biweekly, the size of 8 pages.

ORDER: 850

PRINT RUN: 6,000



OPINIONS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

Building Civil Service Excellence in Post-2015 Development Agenda

By Kairat Abdrakhmanov

This September, we usher in the post-2015 development agenda with a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by UN member states, with civil society participation, based on national, regional and global consultations.

These goals are transformative and their impact goes far beyond the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in vision, complexity, outreach and implications.

Amongst them is Goal 16, according to which countries will “promote peaceful and inclusive societies with justice for all and build effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”.

Building civil service excellence will therefore certainly be critical to achieving this goal. Likewise, the proposed Goal 17 on means of implementation calls for institutional capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to operationalise all the SDGs, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.

Both of these gave birth to the idea of creating the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana, at the initiative of Kazakhstan with a view to seek innovative mechanisms to ensure equitable, effective and efficient delivery of public service to its people.

But the intent was also for the wider region of Central Asia and



UN Photo/Mark Garten

CIS countries to gain from it through advancing “the knowledge base, evidence-informed solutions, practical tools and guidance, and pursuit of emerging and innovative public administration and management models and thinking”.

The idea of setting up this hub arose from the struggles of a country in transition. Kazakhstan, since its independence, just like other newly independent nations in the region witnessed profound political, socio-economic and administrative transformations.

This scholarship scheme has been serving to level the playing field by providing access to quality education and developing capable and well-qualified human capital.

In the early nineties, the economic linkages of Kazakhstan with other 14 republics were abruptly discontinued which led to increased unemployment, devaluation of savings and galloping inflation of up to 2,500 percent.

Against this backdrop, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, first of all, initiated socio-economic reforms, followed by innovations and reforms in the administrative sphere, which the evolving times demanded.

Having no experience of a market economy, the government had to implement reforms with the available personnel. However, the President’s long term vision of subsequent reforms required a new generation of public sector leaders and technocrats which resulted in a generous scholarship programme offered by the government.

The objective was to provide talented youth with free access to education in leading universities globally. Since 1993, about 10,000 Kazakh students gained degrees in the best universities and joined the job market at home, including the civil service.

This scholarship scheme has been serving to level the playing field by providing access to quality education and developing capable and well qualified human capital.

Having stabilised economic growth in the 1990s, Kazakhstan went further and was first among the CIS countries to significantly modernise its civil service with meritocracy as the key principle.

We acknowledged that the sustainability of reforms was heavily dependent on the quality of institutions, and of the civil service, in particular.

Importantly, the key characteris-

tics of reforms in Kazakhstan have always been logical consistency and continuity. A clear indication of this is the set of five institutional reforms recently announced by our President, the first of which is improved civil service modernisation.

The aim here is to form a professional, accountable and transparent state apparatus in order to ensure sustainable development of the country. The responsible body for this is the National Commission on Modernisation headed by the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan.

Under this process of transformation, criteria will be established to monitor activities and evaluate the efficiency of each government agency, concerned minister or local governor.

The role of communities in state bodies and local administration will also be strengthened by allowing them to participate and monitor results of strategic plans and development programmes. Civil society will also be engaged in the process of identifying budgets, relevant laws and regulations.

In this endeavour, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) as a trusted partner has been continuously supporting the reform efforts in Kazakhstan since our independence. Now, we count on the longer term strategic partnership with UNDP all the more, particularly with regards to all the five institutional reforms.

Clearly, Kazakhstan believes in

sharing accumulated experience and knowledge, as well as promoting cooperation among the countries and institutions in its region and beyond. Therefore, Kazakhstan’s initiative of the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana was founded by 25 countries and five international organisations, at a founding conference in 2013, with the UNDP as the key partner.

The aim of the Astana hub is to facilitate regional, as well as inter-regional professional dialogue in order to promote civil service excellence. This idea has resonated with the hub today comprising more than 30 countries in 2014, including OECD and EU member countries, as well as China, India, Turkey, and CIS countries. The hub is thus fostering dialogue between countries of Europe and Asia.

Last year also saw the hub taking concrete shape with an agreement between the government of Kazakhstan and the UNDP, by which Kazakhstan agreed to make considerable resources available to support the hub and thus expand its scope and gains to enhance the field of civil service in the region and beyond.

As Helen Clark, UNDP administrator, noted, “Establishment of the hub and its success has been made possible because countries like Kazakhstan are ready to share their experiences with reforms...such as the introduction of meritocracy into professional civil service”.

According to the UNDP, “the hub

also offers the potential for continuing Kazakhstan’s emerging global role in providing official development assistance (ODA) to other countries”.

Kazakhstan, with guidance from the UNDP, has established its national agency for international aid, called KazAID, which marks an important evolution and achievement in the country’s significance regionally and globally. The support and partnership will focus on Africa, the landlocked countries and small island developing states.

Kazakhstan will continually aspire to serve as an active contributor to the global development agenda. Our efforts will add practical solutions for implementing the post-2015 phase most effectively, with particular relevance to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which calls for inter alia promoting accountable institutions and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

To conclude, Kazakhstan stands ready and is fully committed to help facilitate regional and interregional initiatives in civil service excellence, and contribute concretely to the achievement of the SDGs in the coming years.

The author is Permanent of Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations. This opinion was first published by the Inter Press Service News Agency.

A European View on the Voyage to Kazakhstan, to the East

By Svetlana Kovalskaya

The large reforming process which occurred in the territory of Eurasia in the 15th century changed the geopolitical and socio-political order in the region. The domination of the Golden Horde had finished and the era of global colonial expansion began. Hanseatic merchants, who supplied the entire West with Eastern products such as spices, precious stones, silk and other luxury goods, were replaced by merchants from Portugal in the period from the 12th-15th centuries and England in the second half of the 16th century. Between the 16th and the beginning of the following century, dominance appeared at the hands of Holland. During the entire period, Europeans randomly came to the Kazakh steppes or had the opportunity to learn about the region first-hand.

At the same time, the area of nomadic distribution in Eurasia began to constrict and the level of political instability started to grow. The efforts of local individual rulers led to the creation of sufficiently-strong military states; however, after their deaths these alliances typically failed. The caravan routes were

changed to avoid these areas because of the lack of economic benefits. With the collapse of the Golden Horde, the geopolitical vector of the development of Eurasia shifted to the other course.

The Kazakh Khanate was established in the 15th century and forced to endure the hardships of that time. Multiple targets of colonial policy required specific knowledge. Thus, the role of missionaries, diplomats, merchants, soldiers, officials and travelers was of high importance. The period was one of rapid development of European cartography and experts note the first modern world map was created in 1450 by Venetian monk Fra Mauro. It is believed he used information collected by travellers such as Marco Polo, Niccolo de Conti and others and the map shows the cities of Otrar and Almalyk, as well as the Aral Sea and Sarysu and Ilel rivers.

Jehoshaphat Barbaro, a Venetian nobleman and diplomat who made several trips to Central Asia in the middle of the 15th century, was trying to reach India. In his 1543 book “Journey to Tan,” he described steppe inhabitants called Tatars. He also noted that Italians could use

their ships to travel across the Caspian Sea. Another Venetian ambassador, Cantarini Ambrogio, also mentioned Tatars after travelling across Persia, Caucasus, Moscow and the Volga River two decades after Barbaro returned from his journey to Tan.

The territory of modern Kazakhstan was once part of various political unions which emerged in the Eurasian space. This influenced the perception of the state from the outside. Several openings in the region also occurred irregularly at different periods of time. This was due to the gradual interest in the region as a result of changes in both the geopolitical and national attention of neighbouring countries. Such interest was caused by diplomatic or missionary purposes, as in the case of journeys to the East organised by William of Rubruck, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine and Polo. After the Mongol invasion, the territory of the Kazakh steppe became of high interest again only in the 18th century.

With his 1549 book “Notes on Muscovite Affairs,” Baron Sigismund Herberstein played a significant role in the formation of certain representations of the region. For

example, he highlighted different groups of Tatars who lived in this territory. Siberian Tatars were also described by Rafael Barberini, who visited Muscovy in 1564 and reported about the trip in his book, “Travel to Muscovy.”

The 16th century brought a new type of traveller connected to trade. One of the first merchants who visited the Kazakh steppe was Anthony Jenkinson. He kept a diary, in which he mentioned Kazakh ruler Khan Hak-Nazaire and the wars he led to conquer towns near the Syr Darya River, as well as the activities and beliefs of the locals. In addition, Jenkinson was one of the creators of the unique map of Russia, Muscovy and Tartaria published in London in 1562, where he also distinguished the territory of Kazakia.

In the 17th century, Frenchman Barthélemy de Molenvin in his “Eastern Library” formed a particular image of the Asian region. This work was published in Paris in 1697 in the form of a historical dictionary dedicated to the Orient and created on the basis of Persian, Arab and Chagatay sources. The dictionary contained information including names and concepts such as

Otrar, Turk, Turkic features, Tyurkaman, Tyurkesan, Karakum, Genghis Khan, Uzbek, Ulugbek Khanbalik and others which related to the Kazakh Khanate.

Philippe Avril of France, visited Russia twice in order to obtain permission to travel to China. He arrived in Moscow for the first time in January 1687, where he found Tatar and Uzbek merchants who originally came from Central Asia. They convinced him to use the Siberian route to China, as it was the shortest and most convenient one. It is possible to find references concerning the individual characteristics of Uzbek Tatars, Oriental Tatars, Yakuts, Tungus and others in his travel notes.

In a book written by Nicholas Spafariya, who served in an embassy in Moscow and earlier made a trip to China through Siberia, readers can learn about the steppes that lie on the border with China and were inhabited by Kalmyks and Tatars. As part of his diplomatic mission, Spafariya had to go through the territory of the Kazakh steppes, but once he learned it was not a safe place because of permanent conflicts he decided to go along the Irtysh and Ob rivers.

Amsterdam mayor, politician and

businessman Nicholas Cornelius visited Russia in 1664 and 1665 as part of a diplomatic mission. In his book “Northern and Eastern Tatars” published in Amsterdam in 1692, he introduced the territory of the nomadic steppes of Eurasia, as well as Russia, Siberia and even the Arctic region.

It is impossible to mention all the European authors who wrote about the Kazakh Khanate. Instead, some of the ideas about the region that began to spread and then dominate the minds of Europeans about people living in Eurasia can be related. The territory of the Kazakh Khanate became a transit area for Europeans on their way to India, Iran and China.

Diplomats, missionaries and merchants were among those who visited the Kazakh steppes and then published maps, travel records or scientific works about it. In the 18th century, this territory was also visited by the military, officials and academics in exile. Each of them made a valuable contribution to the study of the country.

The author is a professor of history at the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University in Astana.

Two Recurring Questions

By Rev. Robert Chase

As I travelled home from three days in Kazakhstan at the Fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, I was struck by the number of times I encountered two questions. These questions were perhaps most pointedly asked by Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov in a private briefing with members of the small American delegation in Astana: how can young people brought up in Western ways, attending Western schools, exposed to Western democracy, showered with the opportunities of Western societies be so easily turned to brutality, intolerance and violence by the likes of ISIS, and what can religious leaders do about it?

I confess I did not answer Mr. Idrissov’s questions very well. I was neither clear nor coherent. Nor did I propose a specific strategy. I derive little comfort from the notion that other answers at the congress were also unsatisfactory or that governments have spent billions trying to find a solution. Rather, I was disappointed at my own failure to articu-



late an answer or offer a plan. The congress saw much hand wringing on this subject, much fear expressed for our children; but little constructive response to how we counter the power that such extremists hold over our youth.

So, on the long trip home, with the urgency of the questions fresh in my mind, I sought to formulate an answer to the foreign minister that would be thoughtful, comprehensive and yet strategic.

First, we adults must set the example. We must look within ourselves to determine what we be-

lieve and how deeply we believe it. We must be confident in our conviction that dialogue across lines of difference is a far better answer to the failures of our world than ruthless, intolerant violence will ever be. We who love peace and pluralism must stand fast in this belief and not run scared or apologetically from this position. The prevailing assumption of so many political, corporate, military and, yes, religious leaders is that the very exercise of conversation lacks integrity, is a sign of softness, compromise, weakness and futility.

No. We must boldly, courageously and continuously proclaim that conversation is key to understanding and that understanding is key to human fulfillment. It must become an unshakeable rally cry. We must expose radical narrow mindedness that demonises others as a devastating dead end for the human spirit. Engaging “the other” in dialogue is an act of courage. Shutting down conversations is neither Godly nor tactically productive. It is simple-minded, arrogant and cowardly. We need to tell this story anywhere we find ourselves, no matter the cost.

And in some settings, the cost will be excruciatingly high. Such is the price of moral leadership, needed now more than ever in interactions across the social spectrum, from family members to nations.

Next, we need to counter the negatives that already exist in society, owning the idea that injustice is sometimes done by individuals and groups who profess to live by fair-minded principles. We must expose hypocrisy wherever we find it and call out governments, corporations, organisations and individuals who capitalise on exploitation and demand that they stop. We must begin with ourselves and ask how we are complicit with systemic injustice. When whole groups are persecuted to maintain the status quo or feed into an existing power differential, then morality, ethics, values and faithfulness are absent.

We must not just throw an interruptive cog into the wheel of systemic injustice, we must completely stop the wheel from turning. Shut it down. By so doing, we remove injustice as justification for those whose twisted logic use oppression to oppress others. By saying no to injustice, we remove an important rationalization for those who would wantonly destroy in the name of the same. As individuals and social

agents, we must create a new narrative, change the story to one with spiritual and ethical values common to all religions at its core and make the new story engaging and compelling.

While “no saying” is a vital element in an anti-ISIS strategy, it is by itself insufficient. We must also proclaim a loud yes to accompany our emphatic no. We must say yes to the countless life-affirming acts of goodness and generosity that fill our planet each day. We must exploit both traditional and social media conduits to tell very human stories of the good done in religion’s name to save lives, feed the hungry, heal the sick, fulfill the promise of self-empowerment and offer opportunities for hope and release from violence, oppression, isolation and fear. We cannot simply denounce injustice. We must offer an alternative paradigm – equally intense – that lives matter, that relationships count, that communities can overcome onslaughts from all manner of turbulence. We must seize the story from the dominant media narrative and tell a new story, featuring specific examples rooted in generosity and sacrifice.

It is important to remember, despite the impression from pundits and politicians, that only a tiny

fraction of our young people are attracted to the ISIS ideology. While we may not ever fully rid the world of fringe elements bent on destroying lives, communities and cultures, if we eclipse the ISIS saga in the media and in our consciousness with alternate invocations of bravery, risk, sensitivity and love, we will be able to isolate the “terror” that accompanies the current ISIS strategy – its threat that it can strike anywhere, anytime. No, it cannot; but only if we do not let it.

This, Mr. Foreign Minister, is how I should have responded to your question during our briefing. I hope you can forgive my delay and find some comfort in these words.

Rev. Robert Chase is Founding Director of Intersections International. Prior to Intersections, Chase served as Director of Communication for the one million member United Church of Christ, and was founder and President of Creative Connections in Media, a full-service communications company based in Rhinebeck, NY. He is an author and an award-winning video producer/director with more than 100 productions to his credit. Rev. Chase is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.



# EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

## IAEA Board Approves Agreement on Housing LEU Bank in Kazakhstan

Continued from Page A1

This will be the first international fuel bank not under the control of an individual country, the Washington-based Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a supporter and co-funder of the initiative said in a June 12 press release.

The LEU bank will hold a reserve of up to 90 metric tonnes of LEU, which the IAEA announcement says is sufficient to power a large city for three years using a light-water reactor. The bank will be housed in the Ulba Metallurgical Plant in Oskemen in eastern Kazakhstan, but will be operated and managed by the IAEA, the agency said. Kazakhstan's regulatory and legal framework will govern security on the plant, and will meet IAEA standards. The bank will also be subject to IAEA safeguards, the agency announced. "The Ulba plant has been handling and storing nuclear material, including LEU, safely and securely for more than 60 years," the IAEA announcement added.

The IAEA LEU Bank is fully funded by voluntary contributions, the IAEA announced. Approximately \$150 million has been provided by donors to establish and operate the LEU bank for at least 10 years, the agency said.

"This is a significant milestone in global nuclear cooperation that will enable peaceful uses of nuclear energy while reducing the risks of proliferation and catastrophic terrorism," said former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), which first proposed the initiative to establish such a bank in 2006 and which provided the seed money of \$50 million for its establishment. "If the dozens of countries interested in nuclear energy also choose to pursue uranium enrichment, the risk of proliferation of dangerous nuclear materials and weapons would grow beyond the tipping point. This has been our ex-



In this recent photo, Alexander Khodanov, UMP director of sales, shows the lack of radiation from cylinders containing low-enriched uranium that are currently used at UMP and that will be used for the storage of LEU as part of the IAEA bank.

perience with Iran. The IAEA LEU bank now gives countries an alternative to that choice and direction."

American business magnate Warren Buffett, an NTI advisor, provided that \$50 million to start funding the bank, the NTI said.

"The LEU fuel bank is a much-needed investment in a safer world and a valuable tool in helping to prevent future nuclear dangers," said Buffett, according to the NTI release. "I am delighted that we are so close to making the long-discussed idea of an LEU fuel bank a reality." The NTI and Buffett first made their \$50 million commitment in 2006, with the stipulation that the IAEA receive an additional \$100 million, the NTI reported. Additional funds were provided by the United States, the EU, Kuwait, Norway, the United Arab Emirates and Kazakhstan which provides

both monetary and in-kind contributions.

"We are very grateful to our funding partners and to Warren Buffett for their generosity and resolve," said Nunn, according to the NTI news release. "We are also appreciative of the leadership shown by the IAEA and its Board of Governors and the government of Kazakhstan and President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Kazakhstan has made tremendous efforts to reduce nuclear dangers over many decades."

The next steps needed to finalise the process of establishing the bank are the signature of the host-state agreement between the IAEA and Kazakhstan, which is expected in late August, according to the NTI, and then the ratification of the agreement by the country's Parliament. The transit agreement with Russia will also need to be signed. The

IAEA and Kazakhstan are also close to completing two related technical agreements, the NTI reported.

The LEU bank in Kazakhstan is one of a series of efforts to create secure supplies of nuclear fuel for countries in case the open market or other supply mechanisms are disrupted, the IAEA said. Other mechanisms include a guaranteed physical reserve of LEU maintained by Russia at the International Uranium Enrichment Centre and a U.K. assurance of supply guaranty for supplies of LEU enrichment services. The United States also has its own LEU reserve, the IAEA said.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was left with the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal, which it renounced and dismantled over the first decades of its independence with the help of the United States

and Russia and the funding of the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction Programme. The country has since consistently campaigned for an end to nuclear testing and supports a number of non-proliferation and disarmament initiatives.

### IAEA, Kazakh Experts Say Bank Will Be Safe, Secure

A group of Kazakh experts confirmed that the hosting the LEU bank in Kazakhstan was supported by the international community and would not present high costs or risks to the country in a June 15 Central Communications Service press briefing in Astana. On June 18, IAEA Project Executive on the LEU bank Terry Wood gave his own briefing in the capital on the same subject.

Speaking on June 15, Ambassador-at-large of Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Barlybai Sadykov emphasised that Kazakhstan would not bear the financial burden of launching the bank.

"The costs will actually be minimal," said Sales Director of the Ulba Metallurgical Plant (UMP) Alexander Khodanov. "We will bear the cost of maintaining the premises, electricity and heating."

LEU is not radioactive waste, as some have speculated, Sadykov said, and the material is of no interest to terrorists, as it cannot be used to manufacture a nuclear weapon without additional enrichment, which requires other infrastructure and technologies.

The LEU will not pose any threat to the ecology of East Kazakhstan, said Director of the National Nuclear Centre's Institute of Radiation Safety and Ecology Sergey Lukashenko.

"Leaking [of material] is unlikely. In terms of the radiation threat, this low-enriched uranium is virtually identical to the uranium we mine in Kazakhstan. In other words, the danger from storing an additional 60-80

tonnes of uranium would be no more than from any other storage space on any mine," he said.

Other speakers at the briefing were Vice Chairman of the Atomic Energy Committee of the Ministry for Investments and Development Timur Zhintikin and Department Director for Nuclear Fuel Cycle Projects of Kazatomprom Sergey Krechetov.

On June 18, Wood addressed other safety issues.

"The first and most important point and I want to make this as clear as possible - low-enriched uranium is not nuclear waste, so... it can be very safely stored, handled and managed for a long period of time," Wood said.

He also addressed concerns voiced in the media about the safety of cylinders used to store LEU at the Ulba Metallurgical Plant (UMP) in Ust-Kamenogorsk, the site of the new facility.

"It has been shown through a number of tests to be sturdy, reliable in storage as well as transportation. Hundreds of these cylinders are moved by the nuclear industry every week; there have been thousands and millions of movements without any incidents involving low-enriched uranium. So low-enriched uranium is ... at the front end of the nuclear fuel cycle, as we say," he said.

In response to questions, Wood said the bank will be safe from natural influences, including the seismic hazards, and that its uranium will be transported in steel containers in accordance with international standards.

"It is very important to recognise that the Ulba Metallurgical Plant has 60 years of safe and secure experience and operations," Wood said. "We are dealing with well-experienced, very knowledgeable [people], and we are very confident that the [IAEA LEU bank] will be safely and securely stored at UMP."

## Integration, Regional Impact of Geopolitical Trends Discussed in Astana

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA - On June 18, experts from three continents discussed some of the thornier geopolitical issues in Central Asia today, including foreign policy failures, the political and economic impact of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the lack of trust between states of the region and the urgent need for reform. The discussions took place at the Central Asia in Global Geopolitical Trends conference organised by the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies (KazISS) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Office in Central Asia.

"We [in Central Asia] sharply, physically feel how our region is being pulled into geopolitical processes," said Secretary of the Security Council and assistant to the President of Kazakhstan Nurlan Yermekbayev in his opening remarks. "I don't want to exaggerate the challenges, but yes, there are in Central Asia and in many other parts of the world today unprecedented, accelerated information and other processes which force us not only to respond quickly but also to foresee possible scenarios."

The forum gathered experts for panel discussions and question sessions on "The Transformation of the International Relations System," "Central Asia 2020 Development Models" and "Potential and Prospects for Central Asian Integration." It witnessed both optimistic and pessimistic views as well as voices not often heard.

One of these voices was Amrullah Saleh, head of the Green Trend political party of Afghanistan, who reminded participants that his country is "not going away" and that eventually, the region will have to increase its engagement with their neighbour. "If you think containment of Afghanistan is cheaper, you are making a mistake," he said. "Engagement is much cheaper than containment, and disengagement is an illusion." Look at Afghanistan as a new country, he suggested to participants - one that is energy thirsty and provides access to energy-thirsty Pakistan and India; one that is eager to develop transit potential, including the Northern Distribution Network; and one with a thriving civil society.

Regarding Central Asian integration, participants again hit upon the issue of trust between the neighbouring states. We know we have shared problems, said Dosym Satpayev, director of the Almaty-based Risk Assessment Group, but we don't solve them together. Difficult issues like water use and regional security are not going to disappear, and can only be addressed jointly, several participants echoed. There were calls for more frequent and honest discussion fora and more political contacts as steps toward increased regional collaboration.

Education is also important, they said. Central Asian unity is the ideal, noted Burikhan Nurmuhamedov, director of the Institute of National Research in Almaty, but the region has never made it a priority. It should be a priority, and among the young research and political specialists coming out of Kazakhstan's universities with focuses on China, Russia and other countries should be bright young experts on Uzbekistan, for example, and on their own region. He also said that the attitudes of potential partner powers - Russia, Europe and the United States, for example - should be evaluated on how they view Central Asian unity, with the implication being that a region that wishes to unite should choose strong partners who support that goal.

The impact of superpowers on Central Asia was also tackled, as well as their different points of view. From head of the Russia and Eurasian Programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London James Nixey came a sharp criticism of the young EAEU, which he called "economic nonsense," saying so far the union had only hurt regional economies.

Nixey also noted what he called two important geopolitical themes: "a growing intolerance of regional inequalities, which will affect us all ... and a loss of trust in governments all over the world." He also cautioned against a "geopolitical unravelling whereby competition is turning into conflict."

From the Russian side came an explanation of some of Russia's pragmatic criticisms of Kazakhstan's multivector foreign policy. Kazakhstan has wanted to have close rela-

tionships with many partners - but when its partners end up in conflict, Kazakhstan ends up suffering damage from multiple directions, noted Andrey Kazantsev, director of the Analytical Centre of Moscow State Institute of International Relations. Kazantsev also commented in his opening remarks and in response to questions that the issues that have led to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine do not exist in Central Asia, and are not applicable to discussions of the sovereignty of Central Asian states.

Maulen Ashimbayev, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security of the Mazhilis of Kazakhstan's Parliament, discussed the importance of reform in reaching any of Central Asia's goals. The next five to seven years are crucial for implementing reform, he said, without which, "we'll become failed states and a failed region." Kazakhstan is pushing ahead with this through its Plan for the Nation and the recently announced 100 concrete steps, as well as draft legislation he called "breakthroughs."

A press release issued by KazISS on the day of the conference said the event's goal was to foster understanding of the global issues and international relations system that influence Central Asia.

"In the context of the changing geopolitical situation, understanding global and regional processes has become a key factor to solving complex political and economic problems. In this respect, there is a growing role for expert assessments in the analysis of threats and challenges," the release said.

"Of course, the topic is extremely difficult; the region is difficult. ... I think it is clear that the topics and issues from 20 years ago are still important," said Regional Director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation office in Central Asia Peer Teschendorf in his concluding remarks.

"I think today's conference helped us at least clearly define the key moments," said moderator Erlan Karin, director of KazISS.

The conference gathered experts from political and research institutions in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, the U.K., the U.S. and Uzbekistan.

## Kazakhstan Seeks Stronger Ties with Africa



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Askar Mussinov (R) greets Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa Nomandiya Mfeketo at the an event in Johannesburg on June 12.

By Malika Orazgaliyeva

A Kazakh delegation headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Askar Mussinov participated in the 25th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) in Johannesburg, South Africa June 12-15. The AU assembly examined women's empowerment and development in relation to Africa's Agenda 2063 programme. Regional security and migration policies were also discussed.

During the assembly, Kazakhstan's delegation held a side event "Supporting Africa's Agenda 2063: Food, Energy and Water Security." More than 100 representatives of African states participated. Kazakhstan also presented information concerning EXPO 2017 and the country's effort to secure a nonpermanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2017-2018.

In his remarks to the gathering, Mussinov expressed Kazakhstan's position in support of AU initiatives on reforming the UN, its willingness to continue financial and other assistance to the African continent, including fighting the Ebola outbreak that left thousands of people dead in Africa. The participants of the event were also told about Kazakhstan's

initiative to provide food assistance through the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, in an effort to address famine and food security in Africa.

On the eve of the assembly, Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Erlan Idrissov said developing good relations with African countries is one of the top foreign policy priorities for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan, Idrissov said, see such relations as beneficial to Africa, Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

"Africa is home to seven of the world's top 10 fastest growing economies. Over the past decade, it was among the fastest-growing parts of the world. It grew on average 5 percent more every year. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's economy has grown annually on average 4 percent during these years. Experts predict that in the coming years Kazakhstan will be among the world's top 10 oil exporters. We have also recently embarked on a new, long-term development plan to raise our nation into the top 30 most-developed countries of the world by 2050. Therefore, I am convinced that building relations with Africa will lead to positive results for both of our economies. I am particularly keen to develop our ties within agriculture, agro-processing, mining and energy,"

Idrissov wrote in an opinion published by AllAfrica.com on June 11.

Among the guests and speakers were Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Gambia Neneh Macdougall-Gaye, Liberia - Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan, Somalia - Abdusalam Hadiye Omer, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa Nomandiya Mfeketo, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECA Abdallah Hamdok, Deputy Chair of the AU Commission Erastus Mwencha, as well as a number of other commissioners of the AU Secretariat.

Within the framework of the summit, Mussinov held talks with the President of Guinea Alpha Condé, foreign ministers of the South Africa, Gambia, Liberia, Somalia, Malawi, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Mozambique, during which the sides discussed strengthening cooperation within multilateral forums.

During the visit to South Africa, Mussinov also attended the opening of the Honorary Consulate of Kazakhstan in Johannesburg.

Since November 2014, Kazakhstan has been an observer to the African Union, which brings together 54 states of the continent with a population of more than one billion people.



# Nation & Capital

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## Mass Migration Offers Birdwatching Opportunities Near Astana



Pelicans in the Korgalzhyn reserve.

**By Michelle Witte**

ASTANA – In the spring, when the weather warms and residents of the steppe start to dream about summer holidays by some distant seaside, another group of travellers is making a journey in the opposite direction. Only about 120 kilometres west from Astana, hundreds of birds, many from tropical beaches,

come to rest, mate and lay their eggs in the Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve.

May is when things get funky in Korgalzhyn. “Millions of birds are crossing this area and some of them stay for nesting,” Vera Voronova, tourism manager with the Association for Biodiversity Conservation in Kazakhstan, told The Astana Times. Voronova guides wildlife and birdwatching expedi-

tions in the reserve. “May is also start of breeding season, [so] birds have very bright plumage and behave very actively, trying to find a partner.” This is the easiest and best time for birdwatching, she said. On a two-day trip, it’s not unusual to spot 70 species of birds; on this reporter’s trip on May 30-31, 57 species were spotted.

The highlight of the May nesting season, for most birdwatchers, are

the pink flamingos. Kazakhstan is home to the world’s northernmost breeding colony of the flamboyant, pink creatures. Towering on their long legs over pelicans, gulls, terns and other seabirds in the middle of a landlocked steppe that can see temperatures fall to minus 50 C in the winter, it can look as though quite a number of animals have taken a very, very wrong turn.

**Continued on Page B6**

## Kazakh Granny Discovers Whole New World at 80

**By Dmitry Lee**

ASTANA – For Lena Toxanbayeva, the saying “it is never too late” has a literal meaning. The 80-year-old grandmother, who had never been beyond Kazakhstan’s borders until last year, has embarked on a journey to discover a whole new world. With the help of her grandchildren, she has pinned some world-famous destinations on her map, like Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Thailand; mastered Disney World rides; tried to tame wild animals at a Thai zoo and continues to keep herself busy with new travelling plans.

“The first time I heard from my granddaughter that I had become famous worldwide, I couldn’t believe it,” Toxanbayeva told The Astana Times. “But when young people started approaching me in the streets seeking my blessings, I was very surprised. One or two passersby wouldn’t have gotten my attention, but when it’s constant and happens everywhere, I realised it’s no coincidence. People would approach me and ask to be photographed with me and that was when I realised that people can become famous, even at 80.”

Toxanbayeva’s rise to social media fame started modestly, with several photographs posted on Facebook by her granddaughter, Aidyn Toxanbayeva, who travels with her grandmother and shares all the positive emotions of the adventures.

“Foreigners can’t tell where we are from,” Aidyn told The Astana Times. “They think my grandmother is from Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan and mistake me for Chinese. For some three-four years, people would be really surprised to learn that I was Kazakh and could speak three languages, because to them I looked Chinese. But today, people do know about Kazakhstan. I think we owe it to our athletes for that.”

Vibrant and full of energy, Lena rarely gets tired according to her granddaughter. In almost all photographs, she is pictured in eye-catching, colourful Kazakh national clothes and by doing so, helps spread a little part of Kazakh culture abroad.

**Continued on Page B2**

## Anti-Doping Conference Highlights Almaty’s Olympics Hosting Bid

**By Aiman Turebekova**

ASTANA – The 12th annual Asia/Oceania Region Intergovernmental Ministerial Meeting on Anti-Doping in Sport, organised by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), was held June 20-21 in Almaty.

According to Kazakhstan’s National Anti-Doping Centre, 60 participants from 26 countries attended to present their progress

reports, share experiences and discuss alternative ways of combatting doping. The exchanges created a productive base for co-operation and partnership between the Asia and Oceania anti-doping organisations.

WADA was established in 1999 as an international independent agency composed and funded equally by the sports movement and governments of the world. Its key activities include scientific research, education, developing anti-

doping capacities and monitoring the World Anti-Doping Code – the document coordinating anti-doping policies in all sports and countries.

Almaty is the host of WADA’s Regional Anti-Doping Organisation, which is responsible for coordinating anti-doping activity across eight countries in Central and South Asia.

Opening the conference, WADA Director General David Howman said the agency seeks to main-

tain a unique partnership between the sports movement and governments, with its main aim being “to protect the clean athlete and provide a level playing field for all.”

Commenting on Kazakhstan’s efforts in this direction, he said “rapid development of the sport infrastructure in Kazakhstan has allowed the country to become a leader in the fight against doping in sport within the Central Asia region.”

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## Nazarbayev University Student Wins Climate Change Essay Contest, Other Winners Announced

**By Michelle Witte**

ASTANA – A Nazarbayev University student has won an essay contest for Kazakh students sponsored by a collective of European embassies meant to raise awareness and encourage work to combat climate change. The essay contest was part of a joint Climate Diplomacy Day initiative sponsored by the EU delegation to Kazakhstan and the embassies of Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and the U.K. in Astana.

Nazarbayev University student Aizhan Abilgazina received her award during a June 11 ceremony at the EU office in Astana after stressing in her essay that the Earth is “our common home,” that “no man is an island” and that climate change mitigation actions can only succeed by tackling challenges collectively.

Akmaral Zhakypova, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, took second place and Shalkar Nurseitov, a George Washington University student, took third, according to a June 17 press release from the EU delegation.

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Spanish Ambassador to Kazakhstan Manuel Larrotcha Parada (second from left) and Belgian Ambassador Michel Peetermans (second from right) with third-place winner Shalkar Nurseitov. Elnara Bainazarova, coordinator for information at the EU delegation to Kazakhstan, is presenting a certificate.



Lena Toxanbayeva (L) with her granddaughter Aidyn Toxanbayeva pose in front of the Eiffel Tower. Photos were taken from Aidyn’s Facebook account with her permission.

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THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

DAULET SPORTS CENTRE

June 26 at 7 p.m. International Martial Arts Festival

RADISSON HOTEL

June 27 at 7 p.m. Venetian Party with Da Gudda Jazz

ALAU ICE PALACE

June 28 at 9 a.m. Astana cup, table tennis

CITY SQUARE

July 4,5 at 7 p.m. International street dance session

BAITEREK SQUARE

July 5 at 7 p.m. Summer jazz festival astana

KHAN SHATYR SQUARE

July 6 at 11 p. m. Astana day fireworks

ASTANA OPERA

July 10 at 7 p.m. Spartacus, ballet



# Business Centre for Disabled Opens in East Kazakhstan



Staff Report

The Voluntary Society of Disabled People in East Kazakhstan has opened a centre for business initiatives at the request of local disabled residents. The centre will help people with disabilities find jobs and run their businesses, according to information from the Information Centre of the East Kazakhstan region.

The business centre is a joint project of the Department of Coordination of Employment and Social Programmes in East Kazakhstan and the United Nations Development Programme. The centre also offers training courses concerning relevant labour market areas, as well as organises business consulting on state programmes, such as Employment Roadmap 2020 and Business Road

Map 2020 and provides office jobs and supports entrepreneurs.

“The idea of creating a business centre has emerged in connection with the fact that today there are more than 58,000 disabled persons in East Kazakhstan and 15,000 of them are able to work. People with disabilities, especially young people, have a desire to develop themselves, but at the same time they have no opportunity to find a job,” said Aizhan Sadykova, head of the department.

It should be noted that the business centre is currently training 68 people, 28 of them from villages and cities in East Kazakhstan, who will receive diplomas in massage, stone cutting, web design, carpentry, tailoring and hairstyling.

# Kazakh Granny Discovers Whole New World at 80

Continued from Page B1

“We moved to Ust-Kamenogorsk from Kentau in 1993 and everybody spoke Russian there,” she recollected. “Kazakh was rarely used. That’s when I decided to wear a kamzol (a Kazakh traditional long vest without sleeves with embroidered national ornaments). It’s my everyday style now.”

“I have liked all the countries that I have been to! There are no words to express my true emotions about every country I have visited. I am happy to have walked along each street and each district wherever I was. I liked the numerous museums in London; they were live, spectacular and realistic. Phuket’s (Thailand) scenery and nature took my breath away and I enjoyed the exotic fruits. I loved Paris for its beauty, but the monochrome streets and monuments with evil faces left me doubtful about the city. Barcelona is a city of happiness – every



Lena Toxanbayeva at a tiger sanctuary in Thailand.



street is unique and people are cheerful,” said Lena about her adventures in Europe, excited at the opportunities to see new places.

“Now I am ready to travel to Mecca, but my children are not. It’s a holy place and one needs to be spiritually ready for this visit. My

eldest son is getting ready for this trip and I hope to be in good shape next year to travel to Mecca. But until then, I am up to travel anywhere in the world. I am just waiting for the next vacation season to travel with my children and they don’t need to ask me twice,” she added.

There were times, however, when her children had to persuade the granny to travel, times when she felt scared.

“The first time I flew to London I was 79 years old. My grandchildren persuaded me to do it though I, myself, did not want to travel. I was afraid of flying,” Lena told the local media in an interview, “but I overcame the fear of flying well.”

Aidyn suggested that other

seniors might want to adopt her grandmother’s adventurous spirit.

“People should treasure every moment of their lives and not just wait until the end of their days. Unfortunately, elders in our country are not enjoying their lives,” Aidyn told The Astana Times. “They dedicate their whole lives and all their efforts to raising their children and forget about their own ambitions. This is wrong! Children will get used to the comfortable lifestyle and might neglect their own parents. Then, we are surprised that we have elders in nursing homes. My grandmother is enjoying every day, she is still curious about life, she is very active. I would like to say just love your life and enjoy every moment of it.”



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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

# Seventh International Fashion and Design Forum Held in Almaty Attracts over 100 Participants



By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – The seventh International Forum of Talent, Models and Designers of Fashion House International Kazakhstan (FHI) was held in Almaty's Metro Club on June 18–20 and brought together 100 participants from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and the United States, an

FHI press release reported on June 22.

The forum was divided into a Day of Beauty, a Day of Talent and a Day of Celebration. Seven young Kazakh designers showed collections at the event, which included special guests Terani Couture representative in Russia Oksana Yakovleva and Saher Rahmani, an Iranian designer known for his

fashion for hijab-wearing Muslim women. Yakovleva and Rahmani also exhibited collections in a separate showing at the forum.

A number of pageants were also held during the event, including competitions for teens and children. Winner of the Grand Prize of the forum's beauty contests, 15-year-old Diana Bakhtiyarkyzy from Semey, will

go on to represent Kazakhstan at the FHI International Forum in Vietnam. She also won the main prize of the beauty competitions – a diamond and turquoise tiara worth \$10,000, FHI Kazakhstan reported. The total prize fund was \$40,000, the Profashion website reports.

The forum also saw performances by dance groups, sing-



ers and other performers, as well as dombra recitals. The event was supported by the nonprofit organisation "Lots of Great People," which builds a list of people who it believes to have a positive impact on the world, Komsomolskaya Pravda reports. This year, nine Kazakhs were added to the list, including filmmaker Sergey Azimov,

opera singer Anna Azerli, actor Asanali Ashimov and producer Karina Sarsenova, who attended the forum.

FHI is an international nonprofit organisation that promotes fashion and show business and the people that work in those industries. It was founded in the U.S. in 2003, an office was opened in Almaty in 2009.

## Swedish Artist Explores Cultural, Gender Evolution

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – Belarussian-born, Sweden-based artist Ludmila Christeseva has brought the bright, textured paintings and installations of her "Sustainidentity" exhibit to the Kulanshi Gallery in Astana's Palace of Peace and Harmony, with the help of the Swedish embassy in the Kazakh capital. The exhibit was arranged in connection with Sweden's national day on June 6.

"Based on the artist's autobiography, Sustainidentity emphasises the idea of becoming rather than being or even being born a woman," a Kulanshi press release explains. "It also provides an opportunity to observe how different cultures can bring changes into the concept of femininity, into our own stance and understanding of us as individuals."

In this exhibit, which runs through June 25, her story is told through multilayered paintings as well as a variety of sculpted, recycled textiles called toiles.

The skies, seen through a thicker or thinner layer of multicoloured leaves or other obstacles, can present opportunity or oppression. Seen up close, some of the leaves are actually

scraps of newspaper – a network of words and events that combine to create either a ladder or a lid.

The toiles, sculpted like female forms, take shape above a collection of bright high heeled shoes or rise out of the ground in one central installation, and show the tension between being and becoming; a woman. The toiles speak to the processes of construction and transformation both in gender and cultural identity. "Working with toiles, Christeseva wishes to show that becoming a woman is a complex matrix extending through many dimensions and does not have any concrete final destination. Instead, this becoming is in constant flux, moving between recycling, re-thinking, re-forming, and re-configuring," the gallery said.

Christeseva said in choosing her work for this exhibit, she was guided by her understanding of life in the post-Soviet space, but also her sense of being part of Swedish culture. "Showing works on femininity could be a tricky matter in any cultural environment, and here I would try to distance myself from East-West praxis and say that it could be as challenging in Sweden as in Kazakhstan," she told this newspaper

on June 19. "So my approach is to just tell my story and then let people to judge for themselves whether they find something there they can relate to."

Gender issues play an important role in her work, the artist notes. "[G]ender pierces through our way of thinking about culture in general. Hence it also becomes one of the underlying elements of my art. This also builds connection to politics or, I would say, the political in our lives. Sometimes, especially when it comes to thinking about gender issues (which in many countries are still considered to be not important or even derogatory and therefore not even worth discussing), we hardly realise how much of politics is involved in our way of seeing what is masculine and what is feminine. Gender issues are closely connected to question of power. Who can define what is feminine or masculine? Who sets the norms and morals?"

Because of how culturally rooted gender identity is, bringing this particular exhibit to different parts of the world is exciting, she said. The intention is not to provide answers as to what femininity should be in any given context, she said, but to raise questions.

"You can also say that the project Sustainidentity is political, if you accept my formula that personal is political, and my personal experience of becoming the artist I am now is also a story of an individual who encountered power imbalances along the way."

"[Christeseva's] art is contemporary, intelligent and beautiful and represents something quite new to the artistic scene of Astana," Ambassador of Sweden to Kazakhstan Christian Kamill told The Astana Times on June 16. "Furthermore, it explores in a very interesting way the notions of feminism and femininity. Born in Belarus, the artist also tackles issues of identity in different societies, which, all in all, makes this exhibition very exciting."

## Art Show Held at Almaty Metro Station



Viewers take in the exhibition in Almaty Metro's Abai Station.

By Yerbolat Uat Khanov

ASTANA – "Artists Go to the People," an exhibit featuring works of new and seasoned artists, took place recently at the Abai station of the Almaty metro. Coordinated by the Altyn Gallery city craft union and Leonardo da Vinci School of Art, the display presented paintings which differed not only by style and genre, but also by drawing technique.

"There is only one thing which unites all the paintings – all artists are extremely brave people, because they aren't afraid to go downstairs to the metropolitan with their paintings to show them to crowds of people and consequently spectators," said one of the exhibition organisers Olga Vodneva, according to Today.kz.

One of young artists, 11-year-old Diana Medyuk, has studied drawing for a year. Her two glass

paintings were included in the exhibit.

Zhumadil Kerimbek works on national-style paintings distinguished by special country cosiness. He teaches at Kazakh National Agricultural University and his paintings are presented in Russia, Belarus and abroad.

With more than 10 paintings on display, Dmitry Shorokhov was the most prolific artist in the exhibit. He is interested in different categories, such as still life, graphics, patchwork technique, fresco, glass paintings and many others.

The shop owned by Natalya Shumakher offers art therapy and invites anyone who is interested. One of its teachers, Irina Balan, discussed the healing properties of visual art. She instructs children and is sure that the medium can cure a number of different psychological problems, especial-

ly with teenagers. As an example, the painting "Poppies" was created by her 17-year-old daughter.

Passersby reacted in different ways to the display. Accidental spectators were a bit amazed and left quickly and impassively, while others stopped to explore the works of the Kazakh artists. The creators did their best to beautify the space with their paintings.

The exhibition wasn't the first held in the metropolitan. A similar showing, coordinated in 2013, was dedicated to Nauryz, the holiday celebrating the coming of spring and abundance. Organisers consider the location a good one, as paintings are not exposed to the elements. At the same time, ordinary people are surprised by the opportunity to visit the exhibition by merely walking downstairs and feasting their eyes on the works absolutely free of charge.



"The Sky Over Stockholm." Mixed media on canvas, by Ludmila Christeseva.



‘Sleeping Sickness’ Mystery in North Kazakhstan (Almost) Resolved

By Dmitry Lee

ASTANA – Sergey Lukashenko, Deputy Director General of Kazakhstan’s National Nuclear Centre has unveiled some of the results of the research conducted regarding the “sleeping sickness” that has engulfed the village of Kalachi, located about 450 kilometres northwest of Astana in the Akmola region.

The news about the “Sleepy Hollow village,” as it was nicknamed after the reported cases occurred in 2013, spread around the globe and scientists have yet to discover the mystery behind the illness. Villagers randomly started falling asleep no matter the activity in which they were involved and some couldn’t be awakened for days. Afterwards, they felt lethargic, asynergic and experienced short-term memory loss.

Kazakh scientists tried to link the illness to a nearby, closed Soviet uranium mine, but the

radiation level was normal and couldn’t have been the reason for the outbreak, experts said.

“[In Kalachi] we have discovered a high content of carbon monoxide (CO) and hydrocarbon (CH). I would describe the reason for this disease as follows: periodic inhalation of air with a reduced oxygen concentration and the high concentration of carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons,” said Lukashenko, underlining this was a preliminary assessment.

“The most interesting thing is that the sleeping sickness is triggered by a combination of three factors: the lack of oxygen plus the excess CO and CH,” he added.

“Each of these three components separately is within the normal level and none of them seemed to cause suspicions; hence, for a long time we could not figure out the real cause. But when there is a combination of three factors, we observe a clas-

sic synergy effect,” the scientist explained.

“Our version is such that there is a link between the mine and the sleeping sickness; however, uranium has nothing to do with it. Lots of wooden structures were used when the mine was operational, like fixtures, flooring and so on. After the mine was shut down, it was filled with water and wood in contact with water created carbon monoxide. Then, it started to leak outside the mine gradually to the surface,” Lukashenko explained.

The last case of the disease was reported in early April and the scientists say it is likely the symptoms will return in the winter, as the sleeping sickness is also apparently connected with the change of seasons and certain weather conditions. Some residents have suffered three or four attacks over the past two years. In total, about 130 residents have turned to the local hospital for help.

Second Stage of Steppe Eagle 2015 Drills Launch Near Almaty



By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – The second phase of the Steppe Eagle 2015 peacekeeping exercises began June 15 at the Ili training area near Almaty, reported the Kazakh Ministry of Defence press service.

A feature of the second phase of exercise Steppe Eagle 2015 is the preparation of the headquarters of peacekeeping units in the form of command and staff training.

Command-staff computer-simulation training will take place by using the JCATS software programme. The programme manages the process on the computer, including planning, management and the application of units without the expense of motor sources and ammunition and the carrying out of the planned operation. This software programme has been

available since the 1980s and is used in modelling and simulation by the militaries to determine possible outcomes for force-on-force training.

The Kazakh Ministry of Defence has said the basis for the first phase of Steppe Eagle exercise was checking the performance of the Kazbat peacekeeping battalion in executing tasks with multinational forces and a unified command in accordance with multidisciplinary peacekeeping operations.

This year marked the 13th time the exercise was held. The first exercise took place in 2003 as a trilateral drill involving troops from Kazakhstan, the U.K. and the U.S. The number of participating countries has since doubled and includes several ad-

ditional European and Central Asian states.

Annually, exercises involved more than 1,500 people as well as military observers from foreign states, experts from various NATO headquarters and military-diplomatic corps accredited in Kazakhstan.

In consultation with NATO member states, Kazakhstan continues to develop a conceptual framework to reform the defence and security sector and promote basic reform projects in the Ministry of Defence. Cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO is based on enhancing capabilities of the airmobile forces and navy. Parties continue to work together to develop a peacekeeping battalion, which will be able operate in partnership with forces from NATO member states.

It Will Be Unprofitable to be a Bad Doctor, Health Ministry Official Says

By Yelena Brussilovskaya

ASTANA – The 100 concrete steps to implement the five reforms defined by President Nursultan Nazarbayev cover the issue of improving national health care. This was the subject of a recent conversation with Vice Minister of Health and Social Development Alexei Choi.

How is Kazakh medicine developing in practice?

In recent years, domestic healthcare has received major investments, both for the purchase of modern equipment and medicines, as well as for the education of doctors.

A lot of Kazakh physicians receive training in the best clinics in the world, and we are sending doctors abroad, not only from large medical centres, but also from the regions. In addition, the number of master classes for which foreign worldwide known experts come to us and provide training on-site for our doctors has been increased. In addition, foreign doctors also perform complex operations in our own facilities.

Here a psychological factor is important: our doctors see that it is possible, that the latest technologies in medicine are practicable, and, secondly, that Kazakh specialists can then conduct master-classes for their colleagues from the regions.

Hospitals in Almaty are developing very dynamically. Now some municipal health care institutions are not worse than national ones, and some of them are better and with better equipment and personnel. It is encouraging that new hospitals and clinics are being built and not only provided with excellent equipment but also with a highly qualified staff.

It should be noted that the wages of doctors are increasing from year to year, and now are higher than in the general labour market. Therefore, for our young people choosing a profession, there is an incentive to study in a medical institute. Of course, the study takes up to seven years, but then there is a confidence that they will always find work, and that the salary of a doctor will allow them to live with dignity.

And more importantly, and this is emphasised in the Plan of the Nation, the level of salaries of healthcare workers will depend on their contribution to the work, and, of course, the level

of their professional skills. So it will be economically unprofitable to be a bad doctor.

Can we now say that our national healthcare is close to the international level?

Definitely. Now almost all of the technologies that exist in world medicine are used in Kazakhstan. Of course, there are problems and we do not hide it: our hospitals often do not keep up with innovations in terms of equipment; there are problems with the quality of care. But if, for example, organ transplants are considered to be the most complicated operations, they have been performed in Kazakhstan for a number of years. Liver transplant surgery, for example, was considered almost unattainable for our surgeons not long ago. Now such operations are performed even at the regional level. Kidney transplants have become common practice; they are now provided in seven centres. Now, more and more foreigners come to us for treatment, and not only from the neighbour countries, but also abroad.

What is being done to reduce the gap between the major medical centres in Astana and Almaty and regional hospitals? Can people from the provinces access the same technologies as in the major cities?

In each regional centre or village it is not possible to build an ultra-modern hospital; moreover, this must not be done, we should look for other ways. For example, one of the 100 steps ... includes priority funding for primary health care. Primary care would be central to disease prevention and early treatment.

Now, an office of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been opened in Almaty. This is very important because there are a limited number of the regional offices of the WHO in the world and there is only one on primary health care, and it is located in Almaty. Many experts and specialists from Europe will hold conferences here, and training seminars, which will be an additional impetus for the improvement of our health care.

In addition, there is an order by the President for the construction of 350 family regional medical clinics, and the work programme “100 schools-100 hospitals.” We constantly visit different regions of Kazakhstan, including remote places, and see how neat, well-equipped, outpatient clinics with profes-

sional staff are appearing in villages. ... As to whether villagers can receive medical care of an international level – of course, they can. Patients who need it are passed along a chain of rural hospitals through to major regional specialised medical centres in Almaty and Astana. A great helper in providing emergency medical care to people in remote villages is medical aviation, which is also developing well in our country.

In addition, physicians from Almaty, as well as from Astana, provide assistance to the regions, making visits during which they not only perform operations, but also train their colleagues.

What are Kazakhstan’s healthcare problems?


There is the process of population’s ageing, so we need to develop gerontology, the science of ageing and geriatrics ... . In addition, it is planned to focus on childhood, because if children are healthy, we will have a healthy generation, a healthy gene fund for the nation, as is always mentioned by our President.

What is being done to improve the quality of healthcare?


As you know, in the near future it is planned to introduce health insurance, one of the targets of the 100 concrete steps, so I think it will change public healthcare a lot. The financial sustainability of health systems based on the principle of joint responsibility of the state, employers and individuals will be strengthened, and there will be additional opportunities to expand the scope of public health care, which is limited in our country.

As for the quality of medical services, we are working on it, perfecting the Service of Patients Support. If someone is not satisfied with the quality of service, if something is not done according to the standard and so on, the patient can contact these centres by phone or e-mail with their claims. I assure you, every complaint will be considered very carefully.


In addition, at the level of health departments and healthcare quality control committees there are special blogs and hot lines. And I must say, people contact us very actively. If in some area the number of complaints becomes greater than appropriate, administrative solutions are taken to improve the situation.



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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

# NGOs, Government Discuss Civil Society Involvement

By Yulia Mager

ASTANA – Members of the National Coalition of Democratic Forces met June 19 to discuss the importance of the participation of civil society in implementing the Plan of the Nation. Representatives of leading political parties, members of the government, parliament deputies and heads of NGOs attended the session.

Nur Otan Party First Deputy Chairman Baurzhan Baibek opened the meeting by touching on the five institutional reforms announced by President Nursultan Nazarbayev as his elected platform at the party's 16th congress.

"Because of the urgency of the reforms, the Plan of the Nation was almost immediately published; it is a framework that needs to be filled by practical measures. The five reforms are the logical continuation of the ongoing state policy of our President, which allowed the country to achieve impressive success," said Baibek. He added that the changes create an institutional foundation for the country's entry into the list of 30 most developed countries in the world and provide radical improvement in the quality of life of Kazakh citizens.

According to the deputy chairman, all the necessary conditions have been created for the effective implementation of the planned reforms. He stressed that the ruling party is actively involved in this work. Thus, Nur Otan is planning to initiate and push for the adoption of 15 draft laws, including those on public control, access to information and combating corruption. The party will also be implementing the roadmap project, which includes a large package of concrete proposals similar to the Plan of the Nation. In addition, Nur Otan adopted a political doctrine and anti-corruption programme until 2025.

In order to execute the five institutional reforms, Nazarbayev established the National Commission on Modernisation. Kazakh Minister of National Economy and national commission member Yerbolat Dossayev described the work which is being accomplished by the commission.

The minister recalled the focus of each reform and spoke about the current situation. He pointed out that much of work is being undertaken in social modernisation, such as a complete reform of the employment relationship (a new labour code to be developed during the summer in accordance



Nur Otan Party First Deputy Chairman Baurzhan Baibek (C) addresses the meeting as other officials look on.

with the standards of the developed countries and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) and introduction of targeted social assistance. The fourth reform includes implementing several major projects, such as social and cultural tourism, the ideas of Mangilik Yel (Eternal Nation) and introducing its values to the existing school curriculum.

According to Dossayev, the work to create the legal statute for implementing the institutional reforms is expected to be completed by the end of August. By the beginning of the new parliamentary session in September, the complete package of draft laws will be

submitted to Parliament, allowing the deputies to review it in the autumn cycle.

"With the implementation of the five institutional reforms, we expect consistent changes to be carried out with the participation of those who are concerned about the fate and future of Kazakhstan. Knowing work on the fifth reform for certain, I can say that not only deputies and representatives of government agencies are actively involved in it, but the nongovernmental sector as well," said Mazhilis Deputy Nurlan Abdirov.

Speaking of the 100 steps, Abdirov mentioned that society pays great attention to the development

of the law on access to information. Work on the document is underway and the framework includes a proposal to expand the list of entities that are obliged to provide information to the public. The groups would not only be state bodies and institutions, but also subjects of the quasi-public sector, recipients of budget funds, market entities with a dominant or monopolistic position and separate legal entities.

"The National Commission on Modernisation aims at making government as open as possible to the public," he added.

Chief Researcher at the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President Yuriy Bulukhtayev suggested that a state can be transparent only if it has a strong and active civil society. He proposed creating an institute of civil expertise, which could attract experts and scientists from different areas of society.

Lawyer and member of the public council under the Kazakh Ministry of Internal Affairs Irak Yelekeev focused on the second reform in his speech, in particular stressing the importance of a step such as the tightening of qualification requirements and mechanisms for the selection of candidates for judicial office. He also

stressed the special significance of the work to strengthen public confidence in the courts and law enforcement agencies.

"No doubt the Plan of the Nation's 100 concrete steps is a unique, timely and important document. It accurately determines directions for further movement of Kazakh society. Civil society has to start its participation in the implementation of the tasks by transforming their relationship with their target groups, the state and within themselves," noted Director of the Institute for Democracy Yulia Kuchinskiy.

The sociologist stressed that a broader and more effective public awareness is necessary on the activities of the country, but it needs to be as clear and accessible as possible. She added that implementing the five reforms requires a new mindset and thinking from society, which needs to be started in school.

The conversation during the meeting was active and constructive, as the experts incorporated specific proposals in their speeches and comments. All the information related at the meeting will be reflected in the record, as well as in recommendations for the authorities.

Following the meeting, members of the coalition adopted an appeal to the citizens of the country.

# Nazarbayev University Student Wins Climate Change Essay Contest, Other Winners Announced



First-prize winner Aizhan Abilgazina (C) and the ambassadors involved in Climate Diplomacy Day.

Continued from Page B1

"Two issues will be at the core of the international agenda in the 21st century: migration and climate change," said Ambassador of Spain to Kazakhstan Manuel Larrotcha Parada, announcing one of the winners at the award ceremony. "Tackling global warming and climate change, and trying to mitigate their negative effects, is the shared responsibility of all of us to ensure a better world for our children and for the children of our children. The very first step is to raise awareness on the need to take urgent action," he said, the EU delegation reported.

The Climate Diplomacy Day essay contest, announced on May 18, was open to 18-23 year old students on the topic "Tackling Climate Change: Reasons for Global Involvement and the Importance of My Role." Dozens of entries were received, according to the EU delegation, and judged by an assessment panel. Ten finalists were invited to the award ceremony, which was also attended by Larrotcha Parada, head of the European Union Delegation Aurlia Bouchez, Belgian Ambassador Michel Peetermans, German Ambassador Guido Herz, French Ambassador Francis Etienne and British Ambassador Carolyn Browne.

In her address to the finalists, Ambassador Browne said she was delighted to see so many young Kazakhs taking part in the competition.

"In order to tackle climate change, we need to have not only the support of governments, but the support and engagement of society as a whole. Even if you have only just learned about the reality of climate change, it's your first, important step toward a better and a more secure future," she said, the EU reported.

The EU release noted that 2015 is a crucial year for the climate as the international community prepares to adopt a new global climate deal in Paris in December. Bouchez said preventing danger-

Paris Conference of Parties in the EU release. Peetermans stressed that all countries must submit contributions ahead of the conference in order to design a deal capable of keeping the global temperature rise to below 2 C. Etienne told the students that nations' contributions need to be as ambitious as possible. "As France will host and preside [over] the 21st Session of the Conference on Climate Change in Paris, the largest international conference ever held in our country, the combat against climate change

**LARROTCHA PARADA: "Tackling global warming and climate change ... is the shared responsibility of all of us to ensure a better world for our children and for the children of our children. The very first step is to raise awareness on the need to take urgent action."**

ous climate change is an EU priority. The EU is to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent in 2020 and by 40 percent by 2030, and its long-term goals is to bring emissions down by 80-95 percent compared to 1990 levels. "Europe is working hard to cut its greenhouse gas emissions substantially while encouraging other nations and regions to do likewise," the head of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan said.

Other ambassadors discussed efforts necessary for a successful

is the top priority of French diplomacy in 2015. Our goal is to manage to reach a universal climate agreement enabling us to limit effectively global warming."

Climate Diplomacy Day is an activity agreed upon at the EU level, following the first action last December, organised by Germany, France and the U.K. The day aims to highlight positive actions on climate change begin taken around the globe as well as to encourage joint discussion and action, the EU said.

# Law Enforcement, Justice Officials Suggest Measures to Prevent Violence against Children

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – In the last five years, reported incidents of sexual violence against minors in Kazakhstan have doubled, Attorney General of Kazakhstan Askhat Daulbayev said at a recent meeting of Coordination Council on Law Enforcement under the Prosecutor General's Office of Kazakhstan, where he also called for stronger investigative procedures and more thorough assessments of adults who were with children.

"Dangers for children of all ages today are growing and becoming more acute," Daulbayev said, as reported by Tengrinews on June 12. "In 2010, 491 children became a victim of rapists; in 2014, there were 943 such cases." Cases are reported on a daily basis, he said, with 16 cases registered already in June.

More than 600 cases of sexual violence against minors were reported in the first five months of 2015, the attorney general said, including two horrific cases in Almaty Oblast and East Kazakhstan Oblast in which minors were held for long periods of time. He also complained about investigative processes in Kazakhstan, Tengrinews reported, saying cases are "red taped or hidden."

"Let's be honest, despite the clear deterioration of the rule of law in this area, no one has raised the alarm, including prosecutors," Daulbayev said. Nearly 3,000 criminal sexual offences, including 605 against minors, have been left unsolved over the past five years, Tengrinews reported.

The attorney general also said that more child abuse and child pornography videos are being found in the Kazakh Internet space. He opined that the surge of violence against children was due to a general "decline of morality and ethics in Kazakh society" exacerbated by the availability of violent or pornographic materials online, according to Tengrinews. "The population, including children, has unlimited access to social networks, where they are free to view and distribute such videos." Moral, legal and socio-economic issues also contribute to the problem, he said.

Daulbayev also noted a rise in sexual crimes in general, from a reported 1,885 in 2010 to 3,623 in 2014, according to a June 11 Bnews.kz article.

At the same meeting, Deputy Prosecutor General Andrei Kravchenko noted that the country is working toward improving quality of life, including through the newly announced "Plan of the Nation: 100 Concrete Steps," some of which target improving the legal and judicial systems. "Thinking about reducing crime, we focus on changing living standards. However, this approach is defective. A high standard of living, of course, can reduce the number of offences, but the implementation of specific, comprehensive and clear law enforcement measures cannot be ignored," said Kravchenko, according to the Central Communications Service.

He called for the development of a united strategy for preventing sexual crimes. "We need to discuss these issues, to create specific timelines for the preparation of such a strategy and then to adopt it at the next meeting of the Coordination Council," Kravchenko said. He also said the rising incidences of violence against children showed "the clear need for psychological testing when employing people on work related to education [and] training of children. ... It would be good for health authorities to develop a procedure for notifying law enforcement authorities of persons who have mental disorders and a tendency to sexual harassment and violence," he said, according to the Bnews.kz report.

He also suggested that special Internet resources for combating crime be created. "I would like to propose to the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Investment and Development along with nongovernmental organisations together to continue the development of such important online resources as Safekaznet.kz, which receives allegations of illegal content on the Internet. Also, we should create sites similar to the global service Missing-kids.com," he said, according to the CCS.

Kravchenko did note some positive steps in combating sexual violence, particularly with the use of surveillance cameras.

During the same meeting, Deputy Attorney General Nurmakhmet Issayev said the country must consider castration as a preventive measure against repeat offences, as he said is practiced in Russia and other countries. He commented that today, measures to protect the population from sex offenders are insufficient and that recidivism among released offenders remains a problem. "It is, therefore, necessary to subject such persons to psychological and psychiatric examination to establish the reasons behind their crimes and identify the presence of physical pathologies or sadistic inclinations in them," he said, according to Tengrinews.





# The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty Eager to Set New Trends in Kazakh Service Industry

By Dmitry Lee

General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty Joe Ghayad, 42, came to Kazakhstan with his own ambitions – to set new trends in the Kazakh hospitality industry. Almost two years after his arrival, The Astana Times spoke with Ghayad to discover what has been achieved so far.

**How has The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty evolved since opening its doors in 2013? What have you learned about operating a luxury hotel in this city?**

The market certainly evolves every year. It's no secret that the Kazakh service market, although at a high level already, needs more work. Hence our arrival will introduce new service standards in Almaty and Kazakhstan. We have a different concept of service at The Ritz-Carlton.

The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty has over 145 guest rooms and suites and is located on the top ten floors of the Esentai Tower. The 5-star superior hotel offers unique rooms and exceptional service of the highest level.

**What makes your service different from others?**

Our concept focuses on training our "Ladies and Gentlemen," by which I mean our human resources and the entire The Ritz-Carlton staff.



Joe Ghayad

The most important thing for me as general manager is my Ladies and Gentlemen. This is the only asset I have in this hotel. They are very well trained and happy; this means that guests will be happy and that is very important. So our Ladies and Gentlemen are trained to have an individualised approach to each guest. For instance, if anyone needs special care or is not feeling well, our Ladies and Gentlemen will bring a cup of tea. These are small things but they matter. If you forget your belt going into a meeting, all our staff will try and help. Our Ladies and Gentlemen are ready at all times to help and go beyond their means to accommodate our guests and make them feel comfortable.

That is what makes our service unique. But we need commitment

from our Ladies and Gentlemen; it cannot be taught, it's a certain talent. Not everyone likes to drink coffee or tea in the morning; some like a glass of milk.

We are not seeking to expand our Ladies and Gentlemen, as we are focused on quality rather than quantity. Our turnover rate is very low.

We provide a lot of opportunities for our Ladies and Gentlemen; they can transfer abroad to The Ritz-Carlton hotels in Germany, Qatar and the United States. It's like a school; we educate and they learn and grow.

**When the hotel opened, did you feel that you were introducing The Ritz-Carlton brand to the city or were most people aware of the brand and what it represents?**

To be honest, not too many people know about our brand; usually it is known by those who travel a lot for example to the United States, Dubai and Asia. We are still making efforts to promote our brand and hold numerous activities for brand awareness. I think we entered the Kazakh market at the right time. The country is opening up and we can feel it this year especially with the new regulations that allow citizens of 10 countries to travel to Kazakhstan without a visa. It was very good for us and for our business.

**How would you assess Almaty**

**as a destination for luxury travelers? Have you seen any changes in who is coming, how long visitors are staying or other travel patterns?**

Talking about our hotel, our guests are mostly businessmen. We have very few tourists stopping at our hotel. Definitely the market is hungry for products such as service. The Ritz-Carlton is new in this market and we set new standards of luxury in the service industry and people are definitely starting to feel the difference.

**In your opinion, how has the hotel market in Almaty changed over recent years?**

The growth is there; it's minimal, but it does exist.

**Was Almaty ready for The Ritz-Carlton when the hotel opened? Do you think it could have opened a few years earlier, could the brand have waited or did you arrive at the right moment?**

I truly believe this is the right time to open, to set the trend, to train not only for Almaty but for the Central Asian region. The market is here; the country is opening up economically, so we opened at the right time. You will see in the coming years that everybody will follow. The Ritz-Carlton is meant to set the trend and not to follow and I do believe that we came at the right time.

There is always room for im-

provement, as we are new. We need to settle down, continue to work hard in that direction and continue to offer the market the best service we can with the best product and the best meals.

**Is The Ritz-Carlton planning to host any big events in the near future?**

Yes, we recently held The Good Life Food Festival; we invited international chefs and organised a gala dinner. It was done also for our Ladies and Gentlemen, for them to learn and get exposed to other properties in our hotel chain. We have the second anniversary of the hotel coming up on Nov 3. While it takes some effort to or-

ganise a similar event, we are planning to host another food festival on our anniversary.

On a personal note, I wanted to add that we do lots of work with the local community, like in public schools to educate them about the hospitality and hotel industry. We invite them for a tour around the hotel, let them cook a little bit and have lunch. We work tightly with local communities and also have community cleanup days around our hotel. We have numerous community activities. This is part of The Ritz-Carlton community – you need to give to the community and it's very important for us.

Our goal is to continue to grow and learn; that is why we are here.



The Ritz Carlton, Almaty at Esentai Tower.

# Air Astana Named Best Airline in Central Asia, India



Peter Foster (R) receives the Skytrax Best Airline in Central Asia/India 2015 award.

By Aiman Turebekova

ASTANA – Air Astana is celebrating success, as the company was named Best Airline in Central Asia/India for the fourth successive year and Best Airline Staff Service in Central Asia/India for the third year at the 2015 Skytrax World Airline Awards. The honour follows the Air Transport World Market Leader Award received in February.

The Skytrax awards are recognised throughout the world as a benchmark tool measuring passenger satisfaction among business and leisure travellers across all cabins (first class, business class, premium economy class and economy class).

Air travellers were surveyed by telephone, questionnaires and online about their experiences during a 10-month period on the ground and in the air. The survey measured passenger satisfaction across a wide range of performance indicators of front-line products and service including check-in, boarding, onboard seat comfort, cabin cleanliness,

food, beverages, in-flight entertainment and staff service. The survey covered more than 200 airlines, from the largest international companies to smaller domestic carriers.

The recognition is due to Air Astana's flexible offers and comfortable conditions, said CEO Peter Foster.

"We are delighted to have won the award for the fourth consecutive time and would like to thank our customers for having voted for us. We do not take your loyalty for granted and we will continue to work hard to improve both product and service," he added.

A leading company in Central Asia, Air Astana has established long-term client relationships with well-known aircraft leasing company Air Lease Corporation (ALC). The company, based in Los Angeles, California, has customers throughout the world.

"We have a long history and an excellent relationship with Air Astana and we are pleased with the opportunity to be a part of modernising their fleet," said

ALC Executive Vice President Alex Khatibi.

ALC announced long-term lease agreements with Air Astana on June 16 for seven new Airbus A320neo family aircraft, including two A320neos and five A321neos and LRJs. One A320neo is scheduled for delivery in spring 2016, while the remaining aircraft are set to be delivered in 2018 and 2019.

"This lease transaction with ALC is an important part of Air Astana's fleet modernisation," said Foster.

Air Astana operates a fleet of 30 aircraft composed of three Boeing 767-300ER, five Boeing 757-200, thirteen Airbus A320 family aircraft and nine Embraer E-190. The company's offers are a market-driven effort that combines a focus on field-level engagement and specific client demands, as this month the airline launched new services from Astana to Seoul, South Korea and Tbilisi, Georgia. Air Astana began regular flight operations on May 15, 2002 and currently has a network of 64 routes between 39 international and domestic destinations.

# Mass Migration Offers Birdwatching Opportunities Near Astana

Continued from Page B1

But they're in the right place. Kazakhstan's flamingos fly north from inland lakes and coastal areas in Africa and the Middle East, meeting other species that have come from parts of India and Europe. They mate, lay their eggs and raise their chicks communally in a few short months before beginning their long journey south again.

Despite their bright colours, finding the birds can take some effort. The reserve is huge and the lakes broad and shallow, and the birds don't necessarily hang around on the shores. Flamingo hunting involves long stretches of off-roading across the steppe with a guide looking for nearly invisible signs of life. The longer you spend in the reserve, the more likely you are to find what you're looking for. The ACBK organises trips of one, two or three days, usually. "Two to three days are more than enough to see most of the birds of the area, if the weather is good," Voronova said.

Though spring is the best season for birdwatching, the ACBK runs tours all summer and into autumn as well. They also organise a few events per year on International Bird Day, International Birdwatching Day, International Migration Day and other significant occasions.

"I love leading groups, especially with people who weren't interested in birds before. I really like to open their eyes and show how big and diverse the world of birds is. Most people become birdwatchers after our trips," Voronova said.

Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Kazakhstan Eliska Zigova, who visited the reserve at the end of May, might be one of Voronova's newest converts. "I was very surprised at how exciting birdwatching can be! It was my first time and I had always thought that [birdwatching] must be a bit boring and interesting only for ornithologists," she told The Astana Times. "But it was just the contrary!"

Korgalzhyn, Kazakhstan's oldest and largest nature reserve, is

one of the country's biodiversity hotspots and, along with the Naurzum State Nature Reserve, has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list as the Sar'yarka steppe and lake network. According to UNESCO, the lakes there provide feeding grounds for up to 15-16 million birds, including threatened bird species like the Siberian white crane, the Dalmatian pelican, Palla's fish eagle and more, as well as the critically endangered saiga antelope. It contains more than 200,000 hectares of Central Asian steppe, more than half of which is pristine, and shelters marmots, ground squirrels, wolves and foxes.

Many Korgalzhyn tours include a trip to the local museum about the reserve, where a short video notes that Korgalzhyn has no trees. No trees – just flat steppe and flat water, meeting the sky. But this is not to say the reserve is boring; rather, the landscape is full of smells and sounds and textures. Grasses and red poppies sway with the breeze, while smaller, bushier plants like asters and tulips remain still. The sharp, medicinal scent of wormwood rises up with every step, joining the smells of what looks like wild dill and thyme. Dragonflies dart, birds warn each other of approaching figures, marmots bark to their communities from a distance. There is a constant flurry of activity in the sliver of space between the still sky and the still steppe.

"The sheer size of Kazakhstan

and the emptiness of the steppe have created great potential for the development of relatively undisturbed ecosystems," Mike Ratty, who also visited Korgalzhyn on May 30-31, told The Astana Times. Ratty is a professor at Nazarbayev University. "Korgalzhyn goes further, and restricting the entry has created a remarkable protected environment – and all we saw were the edges; how much more is waiting in the interior?"

Ratty, a birdwatcher of many years, said the variety of flora, swarms of insects and large numbers of birds of prey all point to a healthy ecosystem – which is important, as Korgalzhyn is an essential part of several massive migration routes.

"[Korgalzhyn] is important on global scale, as some countries, for example in the Jordan Valley, are using up water, and wetlands for migrating birds are lost. It is to Kazakhstan's credit that it has established this reserve, and should be a part of a broader programme to repair damage wrought by Soviet-era mismanagement of natural resources," he said.

Tour accommodations can be provided in small cabins at the edge of the reserve, or, as on his trip, in a homestay in the nearby village of Korgalzhyn.

"The welcome [and the home-churned butter, fresh-baked bread and homemade jam] in the slightly shabby village is a highlight of my time in Kazakhstan," Ratty said.





# SPORTS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

## Anti-Doping Conference Highlights Almaty's Olympics Bid

Continued from Page B1

"Today's meeting is a unique platform helping to foster the combination and complementing of sports' and governments' respective resources and assets and results in a coordinated and cohesive approach to anti-doping," Howman added.

Kazakhstan signed the Anti-Doping Rules in 2004 and ratified the International Convention against Doping in Sports in December 2009. The country furthered its commitment by joining the intergovernmental cooperation in the fight against doping.

Addressing the conference delegates, Kazakh Vice Minister of Culture and Sport Saken Mussaibekov said he believed "the problem of doping at the moment is one of the central problems of modern sport, as doping is not only detrimental to an athlete's health, but also undermines the foundations and the image of the sport."

In this respect, the official said the Anti-Doping Rules of Kazakhstan, adopted in 2014, fully comply with the World Anti-Doping Code.

The National Anti-Doping Centre was established in 2012 to coordinate and control anti-doping activities in the country and ensure the full functioning of the Anti-Doping Laboratory created in 2002 in Almaty in accordance with the requirements of the convention. According to Mussaibekov, "the centre works in line with all WADA standards as a key element in the implementation of the national anti-doping policy."

Kazakh Minister of Foreign Affairs Erlan Idrissov also addressed the conference. As he met the delegates, Idrissov commended the noble goals of anti-doping activities.

"Sport teaches us essential values such as respect for the rules and the reward for dedication and teamwork, as well as giving a huge amount of enjoyment. But, of course, sport can only have this positive impact if we are confident that those taking part are competing on a level playing field. If athletes have an unfair advantage through performance-enhancing drugs or treatments, it sets the wrong example," he emphasised.

Idrissov also highlighted the fact the conference was taking place in Almaty as the city is competing for the right to host the Winter Olympic Games in 2022.

"It is a bid which has excited the entire country and has the full backing of the government. We may have been underdogs when

the process started, but the beauty of sports is that the favourites don't always win – and it is clear we have been catching up fast," he said in this regard.

The minister said his hope was to "welcome all of you again to Almaty to enjoy what I am sure will be a wonderful event in a city and country steeped in the tradition of winter sport." He added that "thanks in part to the efforts of this conference, we will marvel at the competition confident in the knowledge that the performances we witness are true and clean."

The Central Asian region has never hosted the Olympic Games. When the bidding process began two years ago, Almaty was seen very much as the outsider among cities wanting to hold the event. The Almaty 2022 bid gained momentum, however, after an encouraging evaluation report June 1 from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which noted the relevance of the bid's slogan, "Keeping it Real," in all aspects of the Almaty plan and the successful technical presentation of the bid on June 9 in Lausanne, Switzerland. The final decision will be made this summer at the 128th IOC session in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where 99 voting members will cast their ballots in secret to choose between Almaty and Beijing.

Andrey Kryukov, WADA foundation board member and vice chairman of the Almaty 2022 bid committee, concluded the event by noting the significance the country places on the subject of anti-doping.

"Today's anti-doping discussions are of great importance to the entire sporting society of Kazakhstan. Almaty is the major sports centre in our country and our WADA-recognised Anti-Doping Laboratory is a huge asset in our bid to host the 2022 Olympic Winter Games. We believe that the measures taken to combat doping in sports will contribute to the promotion of sports and culture of healthy lifestyles in Kazakhstan."

Since the country's independence in 1991, Kazakh athletes have won 59 medals (17 gold, 20 silver, 22 bronze) in the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, 643 medals (207 gold, 192 silver and 244 bronze) during the Asian Games, 40 medals (eight gold, 12 silver, 20 bronze) at the Summer Paralympics and one silver medal at the Winter Paralympics. The country illustrated its sports' prowess at the 2012 London Olympics, where its team placed 12th in the medal count.

## Astana Arlans Win Second WSB Title

By Dmitry Lee

The Astana Arlans satisfied the thirsty-for-victory home crowd by claiming its second World Series of Boxing (WSB) title. The team capped season five in Astana June 20-21 by defeating the Cuba Domadores 6-4 on aggregate.

Kazakh Temirtas Zhussupov beat Joahnys Argilagos in the first bout in the light fly category (up to 49 kilograms), while bantamweight boxer (56 kilograms) Kairat Yeraliyev lost to 2012 London Olympic champion Robeisy Ramirez. With the score tied, Arlans captain Samat Bashenov managed to get the home team ahead in the next bout by beating Yasnier Toledo in light welter (64 kilograms). In the middleweight category (75 kilograms), Meirim Nursultanov clinched the first leg of victory by defeating Arlen Lopez. Heavyweight boxer (91 kilograms) Kazakhstan's Vassily Levitt saw his first defeat this season, losing to Erislandy Savon. The first day was finished, with the Kazakh team ahead 3-2, but it was only half the battle.

Day two started with a flyweight (52 kilograms) encounter between Olzhas Satibayev and Cu-

ba's National Champion Yosbany Veitia and the latter lost the fight despite being the heavy favourite. At this point, the Arlans were ahead with the total score of 4-2 and the Cubans sought ways to come back into contention. With the Domadores edged into a corner, the bout took a different turn.

Kazakh lightweight (60 kilograms) Zakir Safiullin ran into a team desperate to rebound in the face of Lazaro Alvarez, who won by split decision and drew the Domadores one step closer to the Arlans.

Kazakhstan welterweight (69 kilograms) Aslanbek Shymbergenov experienced similar pressure against 2012 Olympic gold medalist and International Boxing Association (AIBA) World Champion Roniel Iglesias Sotolongo. He tried to outbox Shymbergenov but was easily worn down and the Kazakh managed to snatch a win, putting the Domadores in yet a worse situation with the score at 5-3 only one more loss possible to escape with a tie.

The Cubans, however, had no intention of making it an easy evening promenade for the Arlans. In the next bout, Cuba's two-time world champion Julio Cesar De La



Erislandy Savon takes a blow from Kazakh Vassiliy Levitt (R).

Cruz easily overcame Nurdaulet Zharmanov in the heavyweight category (81 kilograms) to keep his nation's hopes of a comeback realistic.

Kazakh super heavyweight (91+ kilograms) Ivan Dychko then faced off against first-timer Yohandi Toirac. Dychko, who owns two AIBA World Championships and London Olympic Games medals, had no problems beating the Cu-

Photo: www.worldseriesboxing.com

## 'Denis and Friends Ice Show' Held in Almaty With Top International Skaters

By Julia Rutz

Kazakhstan-born figure skater and bronze medal winner at the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games Denis Ten brought his third "Denis and Friends Ice Show" to Almaty on Jun. 20-21.

Among those performing were prominent figure skaters, such as Olympic champions Maxim Trankov and Tatyana Volosozhar from Russia, Joannie Rochette and El-ladj Balde from Canada, Stephane Lambiel from Switzerland, Marie-Pierre Leray, Jean-Denis Sanchis

and Alexander Lubchenko from France, as well as Olympic champions Qing Pang and Jian Tong from China and world champions Jeremy Abbott, Maia and Alex Shibutani from the U.S. Russian skater Elena Rodionova and Korean skater Park So-youn.



Denis Ten

"This year the ice show will present a new format in comparison to previous years, as they were more experimental for us. At the second show, for instance, we decided to concentrate on celebrity participants. This year we want to improve the entertainment programme by attracting foreign specialists. This year the show will be directed by a Canadian," said Ten during a press conference before the event.

The "Denis and Friends Ice Show" is unique in Kazakhstan. After the show was presented for the first time in 2013, it received a lot of attention as Ten gathered the brightest world stars in figure skating to perform for the Kazakh public. In 2014, Ten's show became one of the topics of discussion in foreign mass media, which called it "a sensational project." Tickets for the show have sold quickly.

Ten is also continuing his professional skating career. This season, Ten won gold at the Four Continents Figure Skating Championships in Seoul in February and received a bronze medal at the World Championships in Shanghai in March. His greatest professional achievement so far has been capturing the bronze medal at the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games.

## Kazakh Children Place Fourth in Asian Chess Championship

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Winning four gold, two silver and two bronze medals, Kazakh children captured fourth place and achieved great success at the Asian Youth Chess Championship. The 11th annual competition, held May 30-June 8, welcomed an estimated 350 participants from 20 countries.

One of the medal winners was nine-year-old Amina Kayirbekova, who took first place. The champion noted she enjoyed the tournament and the chance to face top players.

"The event in Singapore was organised very well. All of us played in one room. The championship consisted of nine matches. I won all of them, because I trained a lot. The rivals were very strong, because the best chess players from all over the world came to participate in this event. All the girls who played at the world championship also participated in the Asian championship," she said in a June 18 interview.

Kayirbekova (under age nine) won two of her team's gold med-

als, with Nazerke Nurgali (under age 11) and Asel Serikbai (under

age 13) bringing home the others. Silvers were captured by Kazy-

bek Nogerbek (under age 11) and Aibek Katenov (under age 13).



Young Kazakh chess players mastering their skills.

Nogerbek and Asel Serikbai, who competed in the under age 13 category, took the bronze medals.

Kayirbekova is sure studying at the chess academy doesn't take away from her school work, but even enhances it.

"It helps to develop logic and to do sums. Studying chess isn't hard for me. I have enough free time to play. My grandfather taught me to play chess and I really liked it. After that, my parents sent me to this chess academy," she said.

Nogerbek, who learned the game from his father and also enjoys it very much, spoke the same day about his silver medal.

"I liked the championship and Singapore very much. The competitors were very strong and I won seven matches. The last match took five and a half hours. We didn't stop the game. My opponent from New Zealand was very formidable and I had a losing position, but finally I beat him," he said.

Nogerbek said usually he goes to school in the morning and has free time in the afternoon. Three days a week at 5 p.m. he studies chess.

"On Sunday, we always have a

play day. We don't have any lessons this day, but play with each other. Studying chess takes approximately nine hours a week plus play day, but I really like it and I am fond of sports, too. I am a judo player," he said.

Senior coach Yerzhan Shakenov noted the aim of the chess academy is to hone the games of not only the current crop of young players, but those yet to come.

"Our academy was established in 2010 on the initiative of the best chess players and coaches of Astana and Kazakhstan and I can surely say that it is one of the best in Kazakhstan. The goal of our organisation is the upbringing of future chess players of our country."

"We study children from four years old and as of today, we have more than 100 students and several subsidiaries. Our motto is 'Strong like Sky.' This motto was very popular when I was a kid; it is very positive and motivating. The best coaches and even the chess grand of Kazakhstan work in our organisation. Our academy has champions of the world and we are really very proud of this fact," he said.

Photo: www.chessastana.kz



# CAPITAL

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

## Astana Awaits Inflow of Tourists after Success in Milano

By Yerbolat Uatkhonov

ASTANA – The Kazakhstan pavilion was acknowledged as one of the best and most popular among the 145 national exhibits at EXPO Milano 2015. It has already been visited by approximately 150,000 people, some of whom plan to travel to Kazakhstan, according to the Khabar TV channel.

“The large and up-to-date pavilion of Kazakhstan, located at the main avenue of EXPO Milano, is eye-catching. Tourists are attracted by the shine of the glass wheat heads beautifying the pavilion’s front and lined up close to the entrance. Approximately 5,000 tourists visit the pavilion a day and nobody leaves it disappointed,” said Zakon.kz reporter Yuliya Gonchar.

“The first thing visitors see in the main room of the pavilion is a wheat cloud. Wheat is the history of our country and it is its present. Kazakhstan feeds not only its own population, but the whole planet with high-quality wheat. This is very symbolic according to the name of the exhibition,” she said about the pavilion, as reported by Zakon.kz.

Gonchar noted Kazakhstan still uses the technology of Virgin Soil chief agriculturist Alexander Barayev. His table was delivered to the exhibition as a unique museum showpiece and pavilion stand assistant Aida Uskelenova noted that it and its accessories are original.

“He used them when he did his re-

search work on Kazakhstan’s soil and developed his no-till farming method. As of today, this method is used all over the world,” she said, as reported by Zakon.kz.

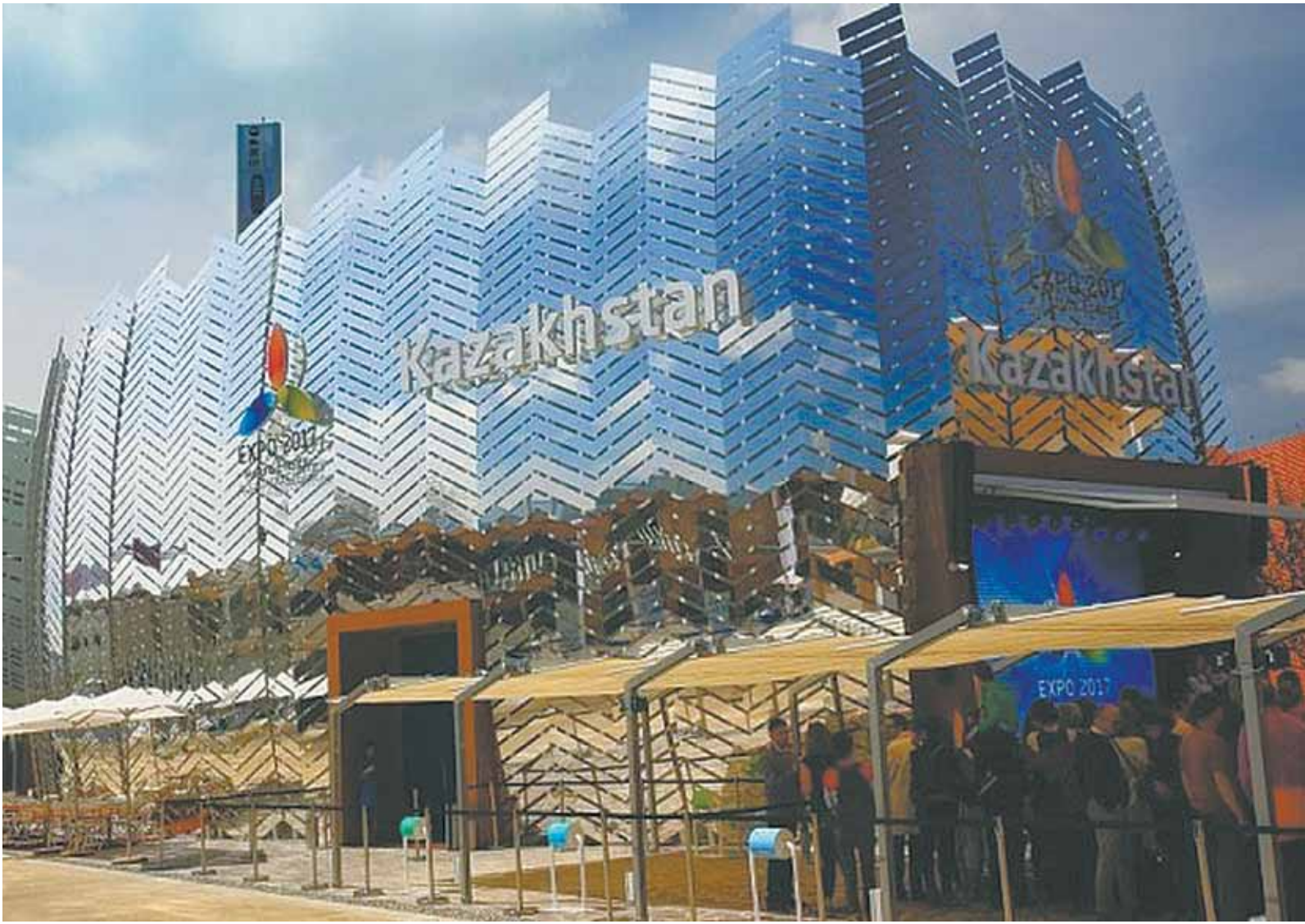
The ability to use one’s senses at the exhibit added to its interest.

“You can see what a cotton plant looks like, taste kumys, smell steppe tulips and discover the biggest apples in the world. That is, you can see, touch, smell and taste everything Kazakhstan is proud of, because even usual things become very interesting even for adults with the application of the most up-to-date technologies,” said Uskelenova.

The majority of visitors are Italian and they don’t know much about Kazakhstan, but she is sure they will talk about the country after leaving the pavilion. Many guests have to wait in line for a long time to enter the exhibit, are excited after visiting it and plan to travel to Kazakhstan, said Uskelenova.

The display cost Kazakhstan 17 million euros (\$19.2 million), but officials consider this isn’t a high price for such high quality.

As of today, EXPO Milano has been visited by 2.5 million people who want to get new impressions of the world and its countries. The 80 pavilions are located on 110 hectares and it is impossible to visit all of them in one day. Italy hopes to attract up to 20 million visitors before the end of the exhibition, when Astana will pick up the baton with EXPO 2017.



## Kazakhstan Seeks European Participation in EXPO 2017

By Murager Sauranbayev

LONDON – EXPO 2017 commissioner and Kazakh First Deputy Foreign Minister Rapil Zhoshybayev visited a number of West European countries in June, negotiating conditions for their participation in the internationally-specialised exhibition with the theme “Future Energy.”

To date, 29 governments and four international organisations have confirmed their commitment to participate, according to the Kazakh Foreign Ministry.

Led by Zhoshybayev, the Kazakh delegation attended the 157th session of the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE) general assembly held June 9 in Paris. Reports on preparations for horticultural Expo Antalya 2016, EXPO Astana 2017 and World Expo Dubai 2020 were heard at the meeting.

Addressing the session, the expo commissioner reported on the progress of confirmations from international participants to attend the event, development of the legal framework and fulfilment of Kazakhstan’s commitments in the face of the BIE requirements. In addition, Astana EXPO 2017 Deputy Chair Vera Kobalia presented the current progress of the construction work, as well as the master, content and communication plans of the exhibition and

the business plans of the company for the coming period. The foreign ministry reported that the officials and members of the BIE “positively assessed” the preparations for the event.

During his visit to Spain on June 15-16, Zhoshybayev met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo, Secretary of State for Commerce and Kazakh-Spanish Intergovernmental Commission co-chair Jaime Garcia-

**To date, 29 governments and four international organisations have confirmed their commitment to participate, according to the Kazakh Foreign Ministry**

Legaz Ponce, Secretary of State for Tourism Isabel Borrego Cortes and Secretary of State for Infrastructure, Housing and Transport Julio Gómez-Pomar. In addition, a series of meeting were held with heads of leading Spanish companies.

Zhoshybayev and Garcia-Margallo noted the high level of cooperation between the two countries and underlined the importance of the planned visit of King Felipe VI to Kazakhstan. On behalf of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Zhoshybayev presented the original of the EXPO 2017 invitation to the king and prime minister of Spain. The Kazakh official noted that Nazarbayev was inspired with the idea of hosting a grand international exposition in Astana when he visited Expo 2008 in Zaragoza, Spain, so the nation’s experience in this area is quite relevant for Kazakhstan.

Prospects were discussed with the secretary of state for commerce regarding joint work to attract Spanish corporate participants to EXPO 2017. Co-chaired by Zhoshybayev and Ponce, a business forum was held the same day toward this goal with more than 70 Spanish companies.

At the meeting with the state secretary for tourism, the sides agreed to exchange experience in tourism development and personnel training. The insight is especially relevant given Spain’s strong position in this field.

Following the meeting, a memorandum on cooperation was signed between Astana EXPO 2017 and Turespaña, a leading association of Spanish tour operators.

Zhoshybayev visited London

June 16-18, where he took part in the presentation of EXPO 2017 for British companies and held working meetings with senior British officials. The latter included GREAT Britain Campaign Director at the U.K. Prime Minister’s Office Conrad Bird, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Tobias Ellwood and Chief Executive of U.K. Trade and Investment (UKTI) Dominic Jermy. Details of the expo were presented to representatives of about 70 British companies, many of whom expressed solid interest in being part of the event, as well as in post-exposition usage of facilities.

During the forum, Zhoshybayev presented the conditions of participation, including customs, tax

and other benefits, to the attention of the U.K. business community.

The parties discussed the topical issues of bilateral strategic partnership with Ellwood, including the facilitation of the visa regime. The British side said the expo would contribute to the inflow of technology, strengthen the scientific base and improve the image of Kazakhstan in the international arena.

At the UKTI meeting, Zhoshybayev and Jermy discussed prospects of speeding up bilateral cooperation in trade and investment relations, as well as ways to involve the U.K. government and British companies in the organisation of the event.

A thorough exchange of views on the British experience in holding major international events and

cooperation was also reviewed with Bird.

A highlight of the visit was a meeting with Kazakh students studying at British universities, where Zhoshybayev encouraged them to actively engage in promoting the event among their peers.

From the moment of the receipt of the BIE flag in June 2014, which symbolised confirmation of the official status of EXPO 2017 Astana, Zhoshybayev in his capacity as expo commissioner has visited 29 countries in Europe and Asia. Further trips are planned this year in order to attract more participants from Europe, North America and Middle East countries, while 2016 would see new attempts to engage Asia-Pacific and Latin American countries.

## Nobel Academy Representative Office Opens in Astana

By Michelle Witte

ASTANA – A Representative Office of the Nobel Academy, a Swiss-based group of educational and research institutions offering online tuition accredited around the world, has opened in Astana, the Astana Akimat (city administration) has announced.

“We are opening the academy in Astana due to the historical cooperation between your country and the Nobel family,” said Philip Nobel, chairman of the Nobel International Fraternity Academy, at the opening of the branch on May 23, according to the akimat website. “It is planned to open representative offices in Almaty, Atyrau and other cities of Kazakhstan. Students will receive two diplomas from the United Kingdom

and Switzerland, having successfully trained at the centre. Upon successful completion, they will be able to continue their studies in any university in the world.”

The Nobel Academy, an online education platform, is based in Zurich, Switzerland and offers a range of educational programmes for qualifications accredited in the U.K., Russia and other countries, according to the academy website. The academy currently offers a bachelor of economics degree from Moscow State Industrial University, a Higher National Certificate and Diploma accredited by Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) of the U.K. in business and related sub-specialties for undergraduate students and a postgraduate BTEC Higher National qualification in strategic leadership and management.

The academy is also a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas between students and scientists. Branches of the academy are now active in Kazakhstan, Russia and Azerbaijan and the programme plans to expand into Asia, according to their website.

The academy will provide five grants this year for students to study abroad in the U.K., Kazakh TV reports. Kazakh graduates will be able to take the entrance exam for U.K. A Levels programmes in June. Graduates will have to demonstrate that they have the necessary English languages skills in order to study abroad. There will also be distance learning programmes in economics, business and law at the academy, both for new graduates and those with higher level educations.

