



Kazakhstan adopts new version of Latin-based alphabet



The government is hopeful the switch of the Kazakh language to Latin script will promote the nation's integration into the international community and enhance the young generation's opportunities to compete globally.

By Elya Altynsarina

ASTANA – President Nursultan Nazarbayev amended his Oct. 26, 2017 decree concerning the transition of the Kazakh alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script, which if kept, would have put into effect a Latin-script alphabet with 32 letters including nine characters with apostrophes. The new amendment replaces the apostrophes with diacritic signs and digraphs. The deadline to complete the switch remains 2025.

The government previously published an action plan detailing the phased transfer to the Latin alphabet. According to the document, the three successive phases will cover 1) regulatory-legal framework (2018-2020), 2) issuance of official records including passports and IDs and trainings for teachers and the adult population (2021-2023) and 3) actual day-to-day use of Latin script in public and state offices, as well as publishing the state media in new alphabet (2024-2025).

Before switching to the Latin alphabet (a modified variant for Turkic languages also called Yanalif) in early 1920s, the Kazakh language was transcribed in Arabic script. In 1940, however, along with other Turkic-speaking constituent republics of the Soviet Union, the country was ordered to adopt a version of Cyrillic, which due to incorporating Kazakh-specific hissing syllables and distinct vowels contains 42 letters.

A public discussion to switch back to Latin script has long continued and grew bigger with Nazarbayev tasking the government in 2017 with drafting a plan to begin the transfer.

The public reaction to the October version of the script deemed it equivocal, objecting, for example, to the use of apostrophes as a non-starter in the digital age.

Anticipating the debate, Senate Chairman Kassym-Jomart Tokayev warned those who began hastily introducing the apostrophe-based Latin script on outdoor signs and newspapers.

"The national commission has not yet made its final decision on the transfer of the Kazakh language into the Latin alphabet. Therefore, it is too soon to use apostrophes in

newspapers and other places," he said.

Several public figures have addressed the latest amendment.

Minister of Information and Communication Dauren Abayev expanded the reasons behind the amendment.

"The experts working on the matter had concerns over apostrophes, because this mark is used as a spacer or special shift-in; it complicates the web search, even creating some financial complications," he said.

The president heard the call and "this version [without apostrophes] will be more effective," he added.

Predicting the questions from the parent and teachers' community, Minister of Education and Science Yerlan Sagadiyev said the ministry is planning to hold open discussions with pedagogues and will draft and pilot a new ABC book. He stressed the switch to Latin script will start with reception grade pupils (a beginning grade with 6-year-olds)

"Only then we can come to a schedule for introducing the new alphabet," he said.

Nur Otan Party First Deputy Chairman Maulen Ashimbayev expressed his support for the new version, noting the decision to switch to Latin script is an important step in modernising the language and adapting it to the global educational, scientific and information space.

"The amendments make the Kazakh language more practical and functional," he said. "It is a strategic decision aimed to work for the nation's future."

Capital deputy mayor and professional philologist Yermek Amanshayev told city residents the transfer to Latin script is a systemic work that engaged distinguished Kazakh scientists and language experts.

"All ideas and suggestions on the matter will always be considered with due diligence. Today, we see a version that suits everyone. But most importantly, it is crucial for our people's future," he said.

Tokayev's recent tweet offered congratulations to fellow Kazakhstanis on the brand-new alphabet, commending the amendment as a historic event.

Kazakhstan supports latest UN report's call for gender equality

By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – Kazakhstan is committed to the type of gender equality called for in the UN Women report published Feb. 14, UN officials said.

"Kazakhstan has also committed to implementing the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), along with the other member states of the United Nations. Achieving gender equality and eliminating inequalities between women and men in Kazakhstan will demonstratively boost Kazakhstan toward its goal of becoming one of the 30 most-developed countries in the world; in fact, it may even be a game changer for Kazakhstan, to propel it into the future – now," said UN Women Representative in Kazakhstan Elaine Conkievich in a UN Women Kazakhstan press release.

UN Women has an office in Kazakhstan and its work is primarily related to leadership and political participation, combating violence against women, national planning and budgeting and intergovernmental support.

The recently released UN Women report calls for the need to ensure women and girls are not left behind in the organisation's Sustainable Development Agenda.

UN Women, established to promote gender equality and female empowerment, published "Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." The report, based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was approved by UN member states in 2015. Half of the SDG targets are in congruence with Kazakhstan's national objectives specified in the

Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy and 100 Concrete Steps.

The document goes further than merely promoting SDGs, however, by advocating that sustainable development can hardly be achieved without gender equality. The breakdown of goals illustrates that gender inequality, ubiquitous in all countries, is related to all aspects of sustainable development and therefore essential for its fulfilment.

The four main recommendations involve adopting integrated policies to achieve multiple goals simultaneously, producing more statistical data to assess the status of the female population across all 17 SDGs, prioritising gender-responsive investments and policies aligned with the 2030 agenda and ensuring a comprehensive approach with gender as a focus.

The issue of gender equality is

pervasive in areas related to basic needs, such as economic well-being, food security and health. Women are 8 percent more likely to live in abject poverty in Central and Southern Asia and 4 percent more likely to live in starvation. Maternal mortality rate in the region reaches 170 deaths per 100,000 births.

Regarding gender equality, about a quarter of women reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from her intimate partner within a 12-month period. High rates of child marriages are registered in Central and Southern Asia, as 16 percent of women marry below age 16 and 43 percent below age 18.

Moreover, women in the region are reported to do three times the unpaid care and domestic work compared to men. Females hold only 18.5 percent of parliamentary seats and comprise a third of researchers. In Kazakhstan, female representation in Parliament is approximately 23 percent.

Gender inequality is also present in other SDGs, such as decent work and economic growth, quality education, income inequalities and peace, justice and strong institutions.

Digitisation programme expected to produce five-fold return on investment, says official

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – Implementation of the Digital Kazakhstan programme is entering its active phase, said Kazakh Minister of Information and Communications Dauren Abayev at a Feb.16 extended board meeting of the ministry. The impact of the digital economy sector will create additional value of approximately 2 trillion tenge (US\$6.2 billion), ensuring fivefold return on investment by 2025.

"The President has set tasks for the digitisation of all sectors, including industry, agribusiness, transport, construction, financial sector, education, healthcare and public administration. The ministry will develop a start-up ecosystem, to stimulate demand for new technologies from the non-financial sector at the legislative level and to create a smart city standard," said Abayev.

The ministry is installing fibre-

optic communication lines in rural areas. It will cover 1,249 villages by 2020 and the effort is considered one of the ministry's most important projects.

"Firstly, it will create a basis for digitisation in agriculture. Secondly, there will no longer be a need for people to go to regional centres to obtain services and purchase tickets. Thirdly, this allows reducing the gap between rural and urban schools in terms of access to knowledge, library and online lectures. The regional state bodies will join the online documentation system," said the minister.

The country ranks 36th, rising five positions in the number of internet users according to the Global Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum.

This year, it is expected to increase the proportion of internet users to 78 percent and the share of local content in IT services to 26 percent.

"The telecommunications market today has a high growth potential.

The 4G technology covers all areas with a population of 50,000 people and regional centres. In this regard, the telecommunications committee in collaboration with the local bodies will monitor the broadband quality in these areas," he said.

Approximately 200 start-up companies will be launched with the support of technoparks, incubators and accelerators, including 33 start-ups as part of the Astana Hub project. The first incubation programme with 14 projects has already been launched Feb. 7.

The service provision system was deemed successful at the end of the year as a result of well-coordinated work with other state bodies, the public and market participants.

About 34 million services were provided online. The 761 services are provided through e-government and 621 services are available through Government for Citizens.

It is possible now to receive 30 government services through the e-

government website with a one-time password instead of an electronic signature. The services to obtain a birth certificate, benefits and kindergarten procedures will be provided without an application.

Third parties, such as state bodies, can receive certificates if they receive confirmation from a citizen.

The digital public service centre (PSCs or TsONs) for services without the participation of operators was also recently launched in the capital.

The digital by default principle will provide the planning and subsequent provision of services in electronic-only form. The paper-free project will be implemented and citizens can receive services without references from other state bodies.

This year it is planned to open specialised public service centres to register cars and issue drivers' licenses in Uralsk and Atyrau.

All regional branches will introduce digital skills learning and the e-government website activities.

#	Letter	Cyrillic version	#	Letter	Cyrillic version
1	A a	[a]	17	Ñ ñ	[ɲ]
2	Á á	[a']	18	O o	[o]
3	B b	[b]	19	Ó ó	[o']
4	D d	[d]	20	P p	[p]
5	E e	[e]	21	Q q	[k]
6	F f	[f]	22	R r	[r]
7	G g	[g]	23	S s	[s]
8	Ğ ğ	[ɣ]	24	T t	[t]
9	H h	[x], [h]	25	U u	[y]
10	I i	[i]	26	Ú ú	[y']
11	І і	[u], [ü]	27	V v	[b]
12	J j	[ʁ]	28	Y y	[ɬ]
13	K k	[k]	29	Ý ý	[y']
14	L l	[l]	30	Z z	[z]
15	M m	[m]	31	Sh sh	[ʃ]
16	N n	[n]	32	Ch ch	[tʃ]

Kazakhstan calls for roadmap with EU

By George D. Gleboff and Aigerim Seisembayeva

BRUSSELS – Kazakhstan has suggested developing a roadmap to implement the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) between the nation and the European Union (EU)

and its member states. Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov presented the idea in Brussels Feb. 26 during the 16th meeting of the Kazakhstan-EU Cooperation Council, the highest level dialogue platform between the two.

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NATION

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Aral Sea revival challenges discussed in Astana

By Aigerim Seisembayeva

ASTANA – Kazakh government officials and representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) discussed mitigating the effects of the shrinking Aral Sea during a Feb. 19 symposium in Astana.

Over the past 40-45 years, the level of the sea has declined 22 metres, the water volume has decreased tenfold and the salinity has reached 80 grammes per litre, said Kyzylorda region Akim (Governor) Krymbek Kuserbayev in opening remarks.

People inhabiting the region started emigrating due to a crisis in the fishing industry and health deterioration. The salty dust from the dried lands spreads all over the continent from the Tien Shan mountains in the East to Scandinavia in the West. Formerly the fourth largest body of inland water, the Aral Sea has shrunk to ten percent of its original size, splitting into the North Aral Sea and South Aral Sea.

“Despite the difficult economic situation in the country during the

first years of independence and in the subsequent crisis years, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has been paying much attention to this issue. Measures were taken to mitigate the impact of the drying sea on the situation in the region, to solve the problems and to develop the territory around the Kazakh part of the Aral Sea... Over 70 international projects worth \$6 million have been implemented to revive the region,” said Kuserbayev.

He reported the economic situation in the region is improving. To date, there are eight fish processing plants in the Aral Sea region, four of which have been built during the years of independence. The volume of fish catch has doubled in five years, volume of exports grew nine fold. Over the past five years, more than 1.3 trillion tenge (US\$4 billion) of direct investment was attracted into the region.

The construction of the Kokaral Dam, which separated the two remaining parts of the sea, in 2006 brought results that exceeded expectations. By March this year, the level of the North Aral Sea will rise and stabilise at around 40 km

above sea level. The salinity of the North Aral Sea began to decline and constitutes 18 grammes per litre. Today, 23 species of fish live in the saved part of the sea, where virtually all the fish had previously died.

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov, who also spoke at the symposium, stressed the Aral Sea disaster was a result of humankind’s thoughtless approach to the environment and use of natural resources. He said the countries of the region need more concerted efforts to overcome the consequences of the desiccation of the Aral Sea.

“At the moment, the countries of Central Asia are at the beginning of their cooperation efforts aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of climate change and increasing the welfare of a growing regional population. The countries of the region are also developing a new mutually beneficial system of trans-boundary water use and protection and are creating a monitoring and controlling mechanism focused on maintaining water resource quality,” he said.

Having noted that Kazakhstan

is party to many water management related treaties and conventions, he reminded that the eighth session of the meeting of the parties to the Helsinki Convention is to take place in Astana in October 2018, which will be the first time the event is held out of Europe.

Abdrakhmanov also highlighted that Kazakhstan welcomes the results of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) Executive board’s session held Jan. 30 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, and is ready to participate in the development of the Aral Sea Basin Programme (ASBP-4), along with other solutions to the Aral Sea basin issue.

According to the Kazakh Vice-Minister of National Economy Baurzhan Bekeshev, there is hope that the Aral Sea will be revived thanks to projects implemented by the Kazakh government with the assistance of international organisations, such as the UNDP, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, among others.

“The Aral Sea issue is still very far from being resolved. But the

sea is being revived, it’s filling with water. On top of its status of the first sea destroyed by humankind, the Aral is close to attaining a new one – the first sea revived by that same humankind,” he said.

UN Permanent Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Kazakhstan Norimasa Shimomura said Kazakhstan has made progress in combating the negative consequences of the desiccation of the Aral Sea.

“The most important task at present is to reduce the destructive impact of the Aral Sea crisis on the environment and livelihoods of millions of people still living in the vicinity of the Aral Sea area. In order to promote this approach, UNDP jointly with Mr. Kuserbayev’s team has designed a project that employs a mix of economic, social and environmental measures with the purpose of promoting sustainable human development of the local communities in the Aral Sea region,” he stated.

The symposium also included the showing of the film “Hello from Aral to Astana” and an exposition of Aral Sea products, including local fish and Aral table salt.

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

The economy grew 5 percent in the Aktobe region at the end of 2017, reported Kazinform. Industrial growth totalled 5 percent. Production growth stood at a record 1.55 trillion tenge (US\$4.8 billion) compared with 1.2 trillion tenge (US\$3 billion) in 2016 because of manufacturing industry development at the level of 7.9 percent or 527 billion tenge (US\$5 billion). Around \$1.3 billion tenge of investments were attracted to the region and 17,000 new jobs were created. “This year we set a task to keep economic growth rate at the level of 5 percent. We need to develop and introduce new technologies in industry, trade, agriculture, construction, small and medium business and other sectors,” said Aktobe Akim (Governor) Berdybek Saparbayev Feb. 21 at a meeting with population.

The KazCentre of Housing and Communal Services Company announced plans to develop E-Shanyraq, a single system of smart apartment management. “We will cover all the apartments and cities. We will also adapt this system for rural areas. We are now working with investors for further possible investments,” said National Company Chairman Nursultan Dzhiyenybayev Feb. 22 at a briefing. The system aims to increase the transparency of business processes for all sector participants, especially residents of apartments. They will monitor all operating fees, savings for repairs, control the processes of management companies and monitor how much energy they consume.

Seven projects worth \$296.4 million were introduced and 1,119 jobs were created as part of the map of industrialisation initiative in the Ak-mola region, according to the regional press service. “The production of vaccines for farm animals worth 60 million tenge was launched due to the state support. It is the first step to create a biotechnological cluster in Stepnogorsk with the support of the National Centre for Biotechnology. We have scientific and industrial potential,” said Ak-mola region Akim (Governor) Malik Murzalim.

More than 627 million tenge (US\$2 million) has been allocated for special equipment at correctional schools. “The project covered 100 schools and more than 15,000 children. However, our efforts and financial resources covered only 15 percent of the required amount of assistance. More problems were raised when we met with teachers. ... The socialisation of children is the main result of the project,” said Samruk Kazyna Trust Foundation Official Representative Lima Dias at a Feb. 22 seminar in Almaty. The equipment provided will help correct speech, language and motor difficulties and develop sensory motor skills during the educational process. There are 100 special schools, 39 special pre-school educational organisations, 13 rehabilitation centres, 173 offices for psychological and pedagogical correction and 68 psychological, medical and pedagogical clinics in the country.

The toll road system will be introduced on more than 5,000 kilometres, said First Vice-Minister for Investments and Development Roman Sklyar Feb. 23, Zakon.kz reported. The construction documentation is underway. “We plan to reconstruct 179 kilometres of highways. An average repair will cover 1,544 kilometres of roads and 644 kilometres of which will be reconstructed using cold recycling technology,” he said. This February the agreement on the construction of the Big Almaty Ring Road (BAKAD) project was signed in Almaty. The project creates a modern high-tech bypass around the city at the intersection of international routes.

More than 300 events are scheduled to mark the 20th anniversary of Astana in June in the Pavlodar region, according to the regional city administration. The National Museum will present the exhibition entitled “Golden Man and a collection of gold items” as part of the festivities. “The negotiations are currently underway to invite the Astana Opera troupe. The concerts of the philharmonic orchestra will be organised in districts. The Sacred Centre – Astana creative festival, an art exhibition and scientific and practical conference will take place in June. A concert featuring Kazakh and foreign artists will be held on July 6,” said Regional Culture Department Head Ardak Raiymbekov.

Investment Ministry to focus on manufacturing, exports and labour productivity

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – The Ministry for Investment and Development will concentrate this year on manufacturing, focusing on export-oriented sectors and labour productivity under the Accelerated Industrial and Innovative Development programme, said Minister Zhenis Kassymbek during a Feb. 13 weekly government meeting.

“To meet the tasks given by President Nursultan Nazarbayev during the Feb. 9 extended government meeting, we will start working on the industrial projects to back export-oriented sectors and increase labour productivity. This year, we plan to introduce 150 projects worth one trillion tenge (US\$3.06 billion) and create 15,000 jobs,” he said.

The next stage of industrial expansion involves transitioning to a new level of technological development with key elements of Industry 4.0. Last year, basic industries were re-equipped in

an attempt to create an ecosystem to introduce digital technology under the Digital Kazakhstan state programme.

“Some support measures will be partially revised for a more targeted stimulation of digitisation in terms of determining the types of costs when reimbursing enterprises, providing grants, etc.,” he added.

Kassymbek said the ministry will also concentrate on the third five-year industrialisation plan focused on the digital-era industry to fulfil the tasks set by the President in the state-of-the-nation address “New opportunities for development under the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

“In general, the implementation of scheduled activities will increase the value of processed exports by 10.3 percent (compared to the level of 2017), boost labour productivity of the manufacturing industry by 6 percent and attract investment worth one trillion tenge (US\$3.06 billion) in fixed assets of the manufacturing industry,” he said.

Within the Nurly Zhol programme, the ministry will strengthen control over the efficient and transparent use of funds allocated for road construction and repair. Mechanisms will be revised to continue executing the Nurly Zher programme.

“We have begun work to improve the national standards in architecture, urban planning and construction,” he added.

This year, commercial banks will grant real estate developers 125 billion tenge (US\$382.5 million) in subsidised loans and 105 billion tenge (US\$321.3 million) in mortgages. The banking sector revival will increase the annual loan volume to 350 billion tenge (US\$1.07 billion) and investors’ share of the House Construction Savings Bank to the economically active population up to 12 percent.

“Planned measures are supposed to increase housing construction volume 6-8 percent, or 11.2 million square metres of housing,” said Kassymbek.

Prison population drops dramatically

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Kazakhstan has made what officials called an “incredible” leap forward on the prison index, moving from the third-ranked country in the world in terms of number of prisoners per capita and dropping to 71st place. The scale and speed of the change is already making Kazakhstan a model for other prison reform projects.

“The prison population is always measured in terms of the ratio to the total population in the country. This indicator is called a prison index,” Operational Leader of Enhancing Criminal Justice in Kazakhstan project Saule Mektepbayeva told The

plying amnesties or other artificial measures to underestimate the indicators. On the contrary, during this period, measures to register crimes were strengthened. However, the overall crime rate in the country declined over the period.

When a decline in the prison population does not lead to an increase in crime, but rather makes living in the country safer, it confirms that the chosen criminal justice reform approaches worked correctly, the expert noted.

“If you look from the research point of view, Kazakhstan made an incredible leap forward, being in third place in the world and moving to 71st place. The decline took place in two large stages. From



Saule Mektepbayeva (C) receives the first prize at Russia's Project Olympus contest in Moscow in December 2017.

Astana Times in an exclusive interview. “The trend of reducing the prison population in Kazakhstan has significantly increased since the beginning of a project called 10 Measures to Reduce the Prison Population, launched by the Kazakh General Prosecutor’s Office and other state agencies in 2013.”

In Kazakhstan, there are now 194 prisoners per 100,000 people, which puts the country on par with Poland. Poland is considered a successful country in terms of prison reform. Experts in the field of criminal justice believe the most acceptable prison index is 150 prisoners per 100,000 people.

“Usually, with such an index, the state has enough resources and time to ensure that the prison system functions correctly. For the first time, thanks to the 10 Measures project, we are approaching this ideal level of the index. For the first time, we see prisoners as an object of work, and not as a large subculture. The proof is the closure of eight colonies in the country. When prisons are closed as needless, this is an occasion for pride – for the country, for the people who made it possible,” explained Mektepbayeva.

In the history of independent Kazakhstan, this is the first time that the prison index has fallen below 200 prisoners, and it has held steady at this low rate for two years. The rate is also calculated without ap-

2001 to 2005 ... and from 2010 to today. This happened without revolutions or other serious political changes. That is why Kazakhstan is a miracle for many researchers studying the lessons of prison reform here. In December last year, the 10 Measures project was carefully analysed by a group of evaluators from Russia’s Project Olympus contest and was chosen as the best project of 2017,” she said.

At the beginning of the 10 Measures project in 2013, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev set a target and an indicator for the country’s exit from the group of 50 countries with the highest prison index ratings. In 2015, after two years, Kazakhstan left that list, falling to 55th place. Then came another precipitous, nearly 20-place drop.

“We should be very cautious when comparing countries by their total prison population ... Here, the most numerous countries will always be leaders, and vice versa. For example, the UK, Italy, Spain, Japan are always higher in this list than Kazakhstan, simply because the population there is higher, but not because their criminal or prison policy is worse. India ranks fifth in terms of the number of prisoners, but India’s prison index is 33 prisoners per 100,000 people, making it 213 in the list of countries by prison index,” Mektepbayeva noted.

Tokmadi pleads guilty to murdering BTA Bank chief in 2004

Staff Report

TARAZ – Muratkhan Tokmadi, a former gang member turned businessman, pleaded guilty Feb. 16 to murdering chairman of the board of the BTA Bank Yerzhan Tatishev in 2004.

The case into Tatishev’s death was reopened after Tokmadi’s confession to shooting Tatishev during a winter hunting trip in a KTK TV channel documentary in October 2017.

The owner of the KazStroiSteklo glass factory, Tokmadi had originally been sentenced in 2007 to one year in prison for manslaughter by negligence in relation to the incident that occurred 14 years ago. This time he was indicted under Article 96 of the 1997 edition of the Penal Code for a murder conspired and carried out by a group of individuals out of mercenary motives.

In his testimony to the Zhambyl region specialised inter-district criminal court, Tokmadi said he killed Tatishev on orders

from Mukhtar Ablyazov, who within a few months after Tatishev’s death overtook control over the BTA Bank and became its chairman.

In 2009, PriceWaterhouseCoopers auditors identified that from 2005-2009, Ablyazov siphoned off more than \$10 billion from this bank through a network of companies he owned. The alleged assassin’s paymaster fled to Britain the same year after the bank defaulted on \$10 billion in debt owed to majority-state-owned Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), Barclays, JP Morgan Chase, PNC Bank NA, Bank of New York and others. The fugitive banker, who is believed to live in France, is wanted in Russia and Ukraine and is convicted in absentia in London for the contempt of court with a sentence of 22 months in prison and in Kazakhstan to 20 years in prison for embezzlement.

Tokmadi told the court that back in 2004 he was under intense pressure from Ablyazov who threatened to kill him and his family if he did not murder

Tatishev. In return, Ablyazov offered Tokmadi \$4 million, a write-off of the loan from the BTA Bank and a new line of credit. According to Tokmadi, Ablyazov indeed gave him \$2 million as an advance payment, which Tokmadi said he had spent for bribing law enforcement officials in charge of the investigation into Tatishev’s death and forensic firearm examiners. He invested the remaining \$2 million in the glass factory.

Since then Tokmadi had worked meticulously to build his image as a successful businessman, a philanthropist and a triathlon enthusiast, even though it was an open secret that in late 1990s and early 2000s Tokmadi led an organised crime group known as the Deputatsky Korpus (Corps of Deputies), whose members terrorised the business community.

In June 2017, Tokmadi was arrested and later, after a plea deal, convicted of racketeering, illegal acquisition and storage of weapons, firearms, and explosives.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakh Senate Chair Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev represented Kazakhstan at the recent annual Munich Security Conference. The conference gathered more than 500 participants, including world leaders, prime ministers, foreign and defence ministers as well as security and defence experts to debate cooperation between the EU and NATO, relations between the EU and Russia, the U.S. foreign policy and the situations in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula, among other security issues. Tokayev discussed cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United Nations with UN Environmental Programme Executive Director Erik Solheim and congratulated Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Beatrice Fihn on winning this year's Nobel Prize. Fihn praised Kazakhstan's peace-building activities and stressed the need for cooperation in nuclear non-proliferation projects.

Ankara recently hosted a Kazakh-Turkish women's business forum meant to boost political, economic and cultural ties. Participants, including Kazakh State Secretary and delegation head Gulshara Abdykalikova, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Hakan Cavusoglu, Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Trade Union businesswomen council deputy chairperson Rukhsar Pekjan and Atameken Businesswomen's Council chair Lazzat Ramazanova, noted bilateral trade reached \$2 billion last year, which is expected to grow five-fold. Women run more than 40 percent of small and medium businesses in Kazakhstan and would like to establish business contacts with their Turkish colleagues. Head of the Turkish Businesswomen Council Rukhsar Pekjan said the council seeks to help women implement projects in the service and textile sectors to boost the competitiveness of women-owned businesses.

Kazakh Ambassador to France Zhan Galiyev recently met with France-Kazakhstan Interparliamentary Friendship Group chair Pierre Cabaré in Paris to discuss ways to develop the Kazakh-French strategic partnership, which turns 10 years in June. Cabaré confirmed his visit to Kazakhstan this year at the invitation of Kazakhstan, stressing the attractiveness of Kazakhstan to French people, not only as a reliable economic and political partner, but also as a country with rich and diverse culture located on the Great Silk Road. Deputy Speaker of the French National Assembly Carole Bureau-Bonnard and Foreign Affairs Committee member Annie Chapelier, who also attended the meeting, commended Kazakhstan's peacebuilding efforts, pioneering role in nuclear non-proliferation and emphasised the need to restore environment in the zones of technological disaster – the Aral Sea and Semipalatinsk test site. Noting significant potential to strengthen bilateral ties, the French deputies also welcomed Kazakhstan's development in recent reforms.

A Kazakh delegation led by Kazakh Vice-Minister for Religion and Civil Affairs Berik Aryn participated Feb. 20-21 in the 13th Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue that gathered experts to discuss religious freedom and practices, human rights, religion's stance towards human rights violations and human rights as envisioned in sacred texts. Aryn presented the report on religious freedom in Kazakhstan, briefing the delegates on the country's experience in ensuring interethnic and interfaith accord, objectives of the triennial Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in the Kazakh capital initiated by President Nursultan Nazarbayev as well as Kazakhstan's efforts to develop a solid interaction between state and religion and strengthen secular principles.

Kazakhstan and India recently agreed to expand cooperation in agricultural production, construction and tractor equipment production and endorsed an updated roadmap on the development of trade, economic and investment cooperation during a recent Kazakh-Indian business council meeting in Delhi. Kazakh Ambassador to India Bulat Sarsenbayev noted the countries' economic cooperation with more than 100 Indian companies expressing interest in trade and economic ties with Kazakh businesses. The group also discussed the possibility of opening a Kazakh freight terminal in one of the sea ports on the west coast of India. The two countries also discussed energy projects, said Sarsenbayev.

Kazakhstan calls for roadmap with EU



Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zakharieva.

Continued from Page A1

The proposed roadmap would seek to ensure the EPCA is effectively executed for both sides. The agreement, signed in 2015, has so far been ratified by 21 of 28 EU member states and was approved by the European Parliament in December. It has been in force provisionally since May 2016, after it had been ratified by Kazakhstan and approved by the European Commission, but requires the ratification by all member states and consent of the European Parliament in order to enter into force in full. EPCA, often called the second generation agreement will eventually cover 29 areas of cooperation.

"The extremely rapid pace of ratification of the EPCA clearly demonstrates the considerable interest of the EU member states in the dynamic development of cooperation with our country. This also shows that Kazakhstan and the EU share the desire to create a new and strong legal basis for deepening cooperation on the conditions of global competition and taking into account their economic and geopolitical interests," said Abdrakhmanov.

The trade cooperation committee and customs and energy, transport, environment and climate change subcommittees are already operating under the EPCA and held meetings in March and July in 2017.

"The realisation of the EPCA's potential meets Kazakhstan's interests, since the document will contribute to the effective implementation of the comprehensive modernisation strategy pursued by President Nursultan Nazarbayev," said Abdrakhmanov.

The EU delegation, which included high-ranking European Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) representatives, was headed by Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zakharieva, whose country currently chairs the EU Council. They discussed the full range of Kazakh-EU issues.

The EPCA's consistent implementation will significantly increase the volume of trade, primarily through the sale of high-tech products, and generate new opportunities for economic growth and job creation, said Abdrakhmanov.

"Strengthening trade and economic ties is inextricably linked with the free movement of citizens. In this regard, starting negotiations on facilitating the visa regime as soon as possible has become an objective necessity," he added at a joint press conference with Zakharieva, expressing hope that negotiations on the latter will begin this year.

In her turn, Zakharieva told the media the EU welcomes "cooperation with Kazakhstan in the implementation of EPCA's priorities." She added that the meeting of the

Cooperation Council "also provided an opportunity to reinforce political dialogue."

"In view of security context we discussed the importance of ensuring regional stability and security [in Central Asia] while also protecting individual rights and freedoms," the Bulgarian minister noted also adding the EU appre-

The EPCA's consistent implementation will significantly increase the volume of trade, primarily through the sale of high-tech products, and generate new opportunities for economic growth and job creation.

ciates Kazakhstan's contribution to the development of a new EU Strategy for Central Asia "especially in the context where we see willingness of Central Asian countries to speak more and more with one voice."

Abdrakhmanov held a number of additional meetings with top officials, including with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, where they discussed a wide range of international and regional issues, such as the situation in Syria as well as the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding Iran's nuclear programme.

The meeting with European Commissioner for International



Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini.

Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica was devoted to the on-going process of renewing the EU Strategy for Central Asia, which is set to be adopted by the middle of 2019.

According to the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abdrakhmanov stressed Kazakhstan's readiness to take an active part in

light of Belgium's bid for non-permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2019-2020, Abdrakhmanov briefed the delegation on Kazakhstan's activities on the UNSC and President Nursultan Nazarbayev's peace-making initiatives. Abdrakhmanov also met with Foreign Ministers Carmelo Abela of Malta and Simon Coveney of Ireland.

Elsewhere, Euractiv, a European media platform, held the forum "What's next for EU-Kazakhstan relations" the same day involving Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Roman Vassilenko, EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian, members of the European Parliament and high-ranking EEAS officials. The participants noted the high level of Kazakh-EU interaction and discussed its growth prospects.

The Kazakhstan-EU Cooperation Council is the highest interaction body established under the EPCA. Kazakh foreign ministers and the member state holding the EU presidency meet annually to review the agreement's execution and discuss bilateral and international issues. The EU is Kazakhstan's largest trade and investment partner, accounting for approximately half of the country's foreign trade and direct investment. Kazakhstan-EU trade grew 25 percent in 2017 compared to previous year, reaching \$30 billion.

EU wants to continue to be real partner for Central Asia, says official

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – The European Union (EU) seeks to further expand its partnership with Central Asia and refine new cooperation mechanisms to address existing and emerging security challenges, said EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian Feb. 22 during the international conference in the Kazakh capital marking the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and Central Asia.

"The timing for this discussion is excellent and cannot be better since we have started consultations involving our member states and partners on a new strategy for Central Asia, which will be fully aligned with our global strategy and which could better reflect new realities in the region, ambitions, priorities and needs of our partners, strengthening their resilience as indicated also in the consensus for the development agenda for 2030," he noted in addressing more than 150 delegates attending the two-day conference.

EU-Central Asia relations have strengthened with the 2007 adoption of the EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership covering a wide range of issues, including priority areas of tackling common security threats, promoting rule of law, education, environment protection and water management and incorporating both a country-specific and regional approach. The renewed document is expected to be ready next year.



EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian.

"I am pleased to note that through these 25 years our partnership has gotten stronger and matured and, in particular, in the recent two-three years acquired a new content and dynamism also thanks to a very proactive attitude of our partners to inter- and intraregional cooperation," he added.

The conference, Burian noted, is an essential part of consultations between the EU and each of the five Central Asian nations.

"Tomorrow we will have the same kind of discussions with Kazakhstan and I remember clearly your contribution to updating the strategy in 2015, where we felt even more than previously that you assume leadership and also ownership of the implementation of our strategy," he said on the first day of the conference.

Burian noted the EU has been supporting the independence and sovereignty of its Central Asian partners since the beginning.

Significant potential for cooperation, the growing market within the region and geographical location of Central Asia as a "major gateway between Europe and Asia" are among the reasons explaining the region's importance for the EU, he said.

"We applaud the important progress our partners in Central Asia have achieved in building their new socio-economic systems, creating legislative systems and development programmes and strategies for reforms and sustainable development," he added, stressing the EU's important role as the biggest donor.

Regional challenges are complex for nations to address alone.

"The EU has identified the cooperation with the Central Asian countries on sustainable development and strengthening their resilience as one of the key priorities of EU-Central Asia strategy," said Burian.

The EU projects contributing to the region's development and prosperity have so far totalled more than one billion euro (US\$1.2 billion) and though the assistance continues, the main work should be done by the nations themselves, he said.

Refining cooperation mechanisms is also an EU priority, including increasing demand for more investments, advanced technologies and trade and economic cooperation, as well as increasing private sector engagement and

strengthening civil society, rule of law and gender equality.

The EU also continues to deepen cooperation with each Central Asian nation through its enhanced partnership agreements, the first signed with Kazakhstan in 2015. To date, 21 of 28 EU member states have ratified the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) with Kazakhstan, while the European Parliament, too, has given its consent. EPCA, in force provisionally since May 2016, will eventually cover 29 areas of cooperation once it is in full force, ranging from cooperation in space to public procurement procedures.

Expanding cooperation with the EU is a "strategic foreign policy priority" for Kazakhstan, said Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov in his keynote remarks to the conference, emphasising the result of these 25 years is a "solid foundation for the dynamic growth" of bilateral cooperation.

The EU has been the largest investor and trade partner, with Kazakh-EU trade accounting for nearly 50 percent of the nation's total external trade and more than 6,000 joint companies working across many areas.

Abdrakhmanov also outlined Kazakhstan's suggestions to shape the new EU-Central Asia document focusing on four priority areas.

"We would like to see the revitalisation of joint work on the development of private entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized businesses – an important structur-

al element of the economic foundation of any country," he said.

The second proposal reaffirms the region's focus on improving energy efficiency and last year's EXPO 2017 demonstrated "the strong interrelation between green technologies, economic and environmental cooperation and global security," he added.

Developing transport and transit potential and bolstering connectivity mechanisms and processes are of equal importance, noted Abdrakhmanov. The measures should help the region evolve and achieve quality integration in global processes, rather than serving as a "simple transit corridor for goods and energy resources between Europe and Asia."

Kazakhstan's fourth proposal entails bringing in EU expertise to assist the region in digital transformation, which has topped the nation's agenda.

Burian noted the region has managed to preserve and reinforce stability despite many challenges, including the challenging situation in neighbouring Afghanistan, economic slowdown and climate change. He went on to reaffirm the important role of Central Asian nations in achieving stability and security in Afghanistan.

"Improved security in Afghanistan would benefit everybody and in this respect, we commend Kazakhstan's initiative in actually organising the first debate in the UN Security Council on regional security and development and the Uzbek initiative in convening a regional conference on Afghanistan in March," he added.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Economy grows 4 percent in 2017 on increases in manufacturing, non-extraction industries

By Aigerim Seiseimbayeva

ASTANA – The Ministry of National Economy leadership outlined Kazakhstan's economic results for 2017 and shared its plans for the current year at a Feb. 12 press conference, reported the ministry press service.

Kazakhstan's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 4 percent in 2017, said National Economy First Vice Minister Ruslan Dalenov. The outcome was determined by the following factors: two-thirds of the growth was provided by non-extractive industries, almost all sub-industries showed growth (31 against 22 in 2016), manufacturing hit a five-year maximum (5.1 percent), the "desired" industries showed a significant increase (e.g., pharmaceuticals grew 41.8 percent) and non-primary exports and deeply processed goods also grew.

"The contribution to the country's economic growth in 2017 was also made by the implementation of the Nurly Zher programme, due to which 11.2 million square metres of housing were commissioned, 4,000 kilometres of roads were reconstructed within the Nurly Zhol programme and 120 projects were implemented as part of the Industrialisation Map. The Export Strategy

provided support to 400 exporters and 192,000 business entities were supported within the Business Roadmap 2020," he noted.

The ministry's tasks for 2018 include ensuring the country's macroeconomic stability, improving intergovernmental fiscal relations, strengthening the tax policy, expanding the tools and approaches of public-private partnership and effectively managing the country's debt.

"To date, 1,145,994 SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) are operating in the country, manufacturing products worth 14.44 trillion tenge (\$44.5 billion) and employing 3,118,448 people," said ministry representatives.

In the past year, the ministry developed systemic measures aimed at deregulating businesses, including reducing the administrative pressure and significantly improving conditions for doing business. A full-scale audit of governmental bodies' control and supervisory functions was carried out to reduce and optimise them.

"To date, 114 spheres of control and 18 spheres of supervision have been revised, with 25 control and three supervision spheres proposed for exclusion due to duplication and lack of efficiency. In addition, 17,654 requirements for SME in-

specification were proposed for exclusion," said the ministry.

A new concept of state control and supervision has also been proposed by introducing preventive control to replace selective inspections. The main tasks of preventive control will be identifying the reasons and conditions for unlawful conduct, explaining the legal consequences of offenses and reinforcing law-abiding behaviour.

In order to ease the burden on businesses of presenting various papers, information requirements are to be reduced 30 percent. Certain new legislative amendments have also been elaborated to improve the business climate.

"Our long-term objective is to let the private sector take the leading role and increase the share of the SMEs in the GDP to 50 percent by 2050," said the ministry.

Kazakhstan's external trade showed good results in all categories in 2017, noted Vice Minister of National Economy Baurzhan Bekeshev.

"We observed a significant increase of 25.1 percent in foreign trade turnover compared to 2016. In monetary terms, the 2017 indicator amounted to \$69.5 billion (in 2016, the indicator reached \$55.5 billion)," he said.

He added Kazakhstan's foreign

trade structure changed significantly in 2017, with an increase in non-primary products and some new export items. Export volume increased 31.6 percent to \$43.1 billion compared to \$32.7 billion in 2016. The share of non-raw materials increased 22.1 percent. Kazakhstan exported more than \$14 billion in non-primary products, which represented 32.7 percent of the total export volume. Export growth was seen in timber, paper and paper products, busses and medicine.

Bekeshev also dwelled on the digitisation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) economies that are Kazakhstan's main trade partners. The key aspects have been determined to implement the union's 2025 digital agenda, which primarily affect the speedy launch of initiatives and project approach to executing the EAEU digital agenda.

Using the EAEU platform allows expanding access to the markets of third countries through trade agreements, he said.

"For example, exports to Vietnam, with whom we concluded a free trade agreement in 2015, rose to \$274.2 million in 2017, which is 25 times higher than in 2015 (before the conclusion of the free trade agreement). To date, we have also completed negotiations on a free

trade agreement with Iran and on trade and economic cooperation with China. This will help increase the volume of trade with these countries in the future," he said.

In 2018, the ministry plans to enhance the access of Kazakh goods to wider markets.

"We are actively negotiating free trade with Israel, Serbia and India. In addition, this year we will continue working on the implementation of the provisions of the treaty with the EAEU and improving the regulatory framework, as well as removing obstacles in mutual trade in order to create favourable conditions for doing business," he added.

Vice Minister Aibatyr Zhumagulov spoke about the ministry's work on developing local self-government (LSG). According to the LSG development law adopted in 2017, LSG budget and municipal property have been introduced since Jan. 1 in rural districts with a population of more than 2,000 people. The rule will be introduced throughout the country starting Jan. 1, 2020. Rural district budgets have already received seven types of tax revenues and five types of non-tax revenues.

"The main peculiarity of LSG budgets is the obligatory participation of citizens in LSG budget and municipal property management," he said.

ECONOMY NEWS IN BRIEF

Direct investment in the Kazakh economy reached 637 billion tenge (US\$1.98 billion) in January, an 82-percent increase compared to the same period last year, reported ranking.kz. The market attracted 76 percent in additional investment, as external money inflows to new funds doubled compared to January 2017. In August, the government published Kazakhstan's investment strategy until 2022, indicating specific target benchmarks. The first task aims to increase the inflow of foreign direct investment 26 times by 2022. In January, the volume of external investments exceeded 185 billion tenge (US\$577.2 million) - twice as much as January 2017.

No significant changes are expected in the exchange rate this year, said National Bank of Kazakhstan Chairperson Daniyar Akishev, reported dknews.kz. "Currently, the situation is favourable both in domestic and foreign markets. In general, I expect the current year to be very calm without any risks for the economy of Kazakhstan. Accordingly, I do not expect significant changes in the exchange rate," he added in response to citizens' questions posed during the online conference. Akishev also addressed the nation's free-floating exchange rate. "This means possible fluctuations of the exchange rate in one direction or another, depending on many factors. This is a new reality, in which the course can change every day. In these conditions, a society that has become accustomed to a fixed exchange rate still very acutely perceives any information about the exchange rate. This topic is of great interest to the public and therefore there are a lot of experts and persons claiming such status," he said.

Five innovative projects worth 12 billion tenge (US\$37.44 million) will be introduced in the Mangistau region this year, reported 24.kz. All are part of the industrialisation map. A large vegetable storehouse will be built in Aktau and greenhouses will begin operating in three other districts. The projects will provide residents with local products, which is especially important for the region, where 85 percent of food is imported. The region's main indicators of social and economic development during the past year are impressive, said Governor (Akim) Yeraly Tugzhanov. Mangistau ranks second in the country in the ease of doing business rating. Plants have been launched to manufacture expanded clay and steel products, shops producing koumiss (mare's milk) and a plant bottling camel milk have been opened. More than 30,000 new jobs have been created and housing construction keeps developing.

Kazakhstan plans to transport 100,000 tonnes of cargo by sea this year, reported dknews.kz. "Over the past year, domestic vessels transported 35,000 tonnes of cargo. In the current year, the planned volume of transportation is 100,000 tonnes; mainly, it will be oversized cargo. On the Black Sea, two tankers of the Kazmortransflot company carry oil from the port of Novorossiysk to the Romanian port. Equipment for oil and gas projects are expected to be transported from the Baltic Sea to the Aktau port until 2022," according to First Vice Minister for Investment and Development Roman Sklyar. He noted that thanks to the agreement reached with the Russians, the permissive procedure for passage along that nation's inland waterways has been simplified for Kazakh vessels.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan will increase the number of jointly manufactured cars to 7,000 vehicles, said 24.kz. The plans also include producing agricultural machinery and buses. Kazakh Ambassador to Uzbekistan Yerik Utembayev visited the largest machine-building plant in Andijon. The car factory produces five models, from economical small cars to large SUVs, as well as 75 percent of the necessary auto parts. Most of the parts are exported to Kazakhstan. Local experts recently developed a new SUV model. If the project proves to be efficient, it will be a completely domestic product.

Ministry to cut public debt, boost tax to GDP ratio

By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – Decreasing Kazakh public debt to 23.7 percent by 2022 using eurobonds and Islamic Sukuk securities and other priorities for economic development, including privatisation, industrial development, an automated customs procedure and new information systems for tax collection, were reviewed Feb. 12 by Minister of National Economy Timur Suleimenov and Minister of Finance Bakhyt Sultanov.

"As instructed by the President at the Feb. 9 extended government meeting, we have identified the main priorities for 2018 in addition to those that are contained in the national action plan. First, we commit to working on tax administration and tax policy improvements in order to increase the tax revenue to GDP ratio to 25 percent by 2025. This year, we will carry out an economic analysis and propose suggestions to address this issue," said Suleimenov.

The ministry will also take strict control of the public debt. Government borrowing and National Bank and local budgets currently comprise 26 percent of the GDP, which is a safe level, he noted. That indicator can be decreased to 23.7 percent by 2022, according to the socio-economic development forecast, and measures will be taken to exclude domestic borrowing from the public debt calculation.

"A thorough analysis of state support measures will be conducted with the Ministry for Investment and Development in the first part of the year to assess how effective those measures were and how they can be improved to help competitive export-oriented business entities," he added.

The ministry will monitor fulfilling the Industrialisation and Economic Growth programme, one of the directions stipulated in the 100 Concrete Steps Plan of the Nation. As the privatisation programme continues, its benefits for business, budget and the economy during the first half of the year will be analysed

with the Ministry of Finance.

"We will continue execution of the second five-year plan on industrial and innovative development. The manufacturing industry still constitutes 11 percent of the GDP due to the overall growth of the economy. Therefore, comprehensive analysis in general is needed to assess the structure of the industry and economics," said Suleimenov.

Sultanov reported on this year's plan to execute the tasks assigned by the President, adding Astana-1, the information system for electronic customs declaration, will be fully launched in April.

"Upon joining the WTO (World Trade Organisation), Kazakhstan undertook to establish the system of tracking goods using lower customs fees. The ministry plans to launch the virtual warehouse module, which will count the inventories of a taxpayer automatically and next year track the goods from the producer to the customer. Thus, the software will help decrease the risk of operations carried out without the provision of goods," he said.

The ministry is also taking measures to increase the number of users of the E-invoice information system, which registers all major taxpayers and 1,500 international logistics providers, to 312,000. All VAT (value added tax) taxpayers will enter the system beginning January 2019. An information system for VAT administration, currently being developed using blockchain with IBM, PWC and the innovative technologies park, will be presented in August.

The number of tax checks was lowered to 45 percent in 2017 and the ministry plans to reduce the figure to 37.5 per cent.

"We will commit to decreasing the public debt as well. Last year, we prioritised domestic borrowing to reduce dependence on foreign funds. The ministry now plans to work with Euroclear and AIFC (Astana International Financial Centre) to issue eurobonds denominated in Kazakh, Sukuk and Islamic securities," added Sultanov.

China's Development Bank registers at AIFC

By Zhazira Dyusseimbekova

ASTANA – Astana International Financial Centre's (AIFC) Financial Services Regulatory Committee recently registered the Development Bank of China, which makes it the 10th participant of the centre. It is expected that by the end of this year that number will reach approximately 100.

"The main news for today is the registration of the representation of the Development Bank of China. This is a significant incentive for the flow of solid investors from the People's Republic of China," said AIFC Governor Kairat Kelimbetov at a Feb. 20 government meeting.

The official presentation of the AIFC will be July 5, during the 20th anniversary of Astana as the nation's capital.

The governor said the event will take place in the building of the Expo Congress Centre. Leaders of major international companies,

development institutions, financial organisations are invited to participate. Ministries and city administration were instructed to assist with the ceremony.

Prior to the official opening, the city will host plenary sessions on the strategic development of the AIFC, including the 13th World Islamic Economic Forum. Also, the first international conference on legal issues will be held at the Nazarbayev Centre.

"At the moment, all the necessary infrastructure and bodies of the AIFC have been created," said Kelimbetov, adding that within the legal and regulatory framework of the AIFC, a total of 30 general-purpose acts and 17 financial services regulation acts have been adopted.

AIFC has been working for a while within the Comprehensive Privatisation Plan, particularly to bring the national companies of Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund to an initial public offering (IPO), which is expected to be at

AIFC. Kelimbetov said a roadmap for Kazakhtelecom's IPO in 2018 has been approved. Similar roadmaps are set to be approved in 2018 for Kazatomprom, Air Astana and KazMunayGas.

"We need trustful content and so the investors would want to come to the country. Therefore, we emphasise the importance of the IPO of national and private companies, the localisation of the management companies of the National Fund, the introduction of investment residency and transport accessibility of Astana. All this is the basis for the active and effective development of AIFC as a regional financial hub," said Kelimbetov.

AIFC's International Arbitration Centre already involves 18 international arbitrators.

AIFC bodies plan to conduct educational events and conferences, including the participation of the Academy of Justice of the Supreme Court and national universities.

Oilfield service companies seek state support to increase competition

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – The Union of Kazakhstan Oilfield Service Companies wants to increase the involvement of domestic businesses and state support for the \$45 billion in projects underway by Tengizchevroil, Karachaganak Operating Company and North Caspian Operating Company, according to a Feb. 13 press briefing.

"Proper use of resources is an essential task for all parties. In this regard, the Union of Oilfield Service Companies Union traditionally acts as an important dialogue platform for protecting the interests of Kazakh companies. Domestic enterprises face a number of challenges including low margins of service-based businesses, closed tender procedures, certain preferences proposed by foreign companies and other things. They believe that the effective measures will be taken to resolve all existing disputes," said union president chairperson Rashid Zhaksylykov, adding the three operators account

for 75 percent of all the domestic oilfield service purchases.

He noted the companies need state support, as they currently must compete in unequal conditions with foreign enterprises that are exempt from import duties and have access to finance.

"Our oilfield service market is profitable for foreign companies. More than 20 out of the 100 largest contracting companies operate in Kazakhstan. Domestic companies have been able to improve their competences due to competition in the local market. At least 1,000 companies with a total number of more than 170,000 employees work in the oilfield service industry. Turnover of oilfield services averages \$7 billion per year in the suboil sector. The share of the three large operators accounts for 77 percent of the oilfield services. There are 66 oilfield service companies in the list of top 500 largest companies in Kazakhstan with a total tax payment of 280 billion tenge (US\$868 million) by the end of 2016," he said.

Foreign investments enable lo-

cal companies to improve their competencies as part of the joint ventures and consortia.

"One of the conditions proposed by the government is that the subsoil user provides the transfer of knowledge, technology and experience. The increase of local content share through the participation of Kazakh companies in major oil and gas contracts is an important part of bilateral cooperation," said Zhaksylykov.

Russia remains an important market for Kazakhstan's oilfield services. Domestic companies participate in the projects in Moscow, Sakhalin, Yamal and other oil and gas regions, providing construction, engineering and drilling services. They also operate in Georgia, Iran, Iraq and Jordan.

The active phase of the future expansion project at Tengiz field will start this year. Tengizchevroil has obligations that the share of local content should be at least 50 percent. The company purchased goods and services from Kazakh suppliers for \$494 million in the first quarter of 2017.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

The Astana City Urban Planning Council recently discussed the construction of another Magnum supermarket in Astana, according to Yelorda Info. Chairman of the Board of Astana Social-Entrepreneurial Corporation Nurlan Zhakupov said the Magnum chain wants to start construction in the developing region this spring and to open by December. City Mayor Asset Issekeshov noted the importance of such projects and stressed that Astana needs retail spaces especially in new districts. According to the city administration, right now Astana has 34 shopping centres, 62 supermarkets, one hypermarket and 25 bazaars. Most of them are located on the right bank, which creates a large load on traffic flows.

The Yandex Taxi has launched its services in Taraz. The average waiting time for a taxi in this city is five minutes, reported Kapital.kz. Customers can pay for the trip by cash or credit card using a smartphone app. The service cooperates only with taxi companies and dispatch services. When distributing orders, the application considers the driver's rating based on user feedback and statistics of completed trips. Right now, more than 1,000 cars are connected to the service. In Kazakhstan, the service already operates in Astana, Almaty, Aktobe, Atyrau, Karaganda and eight other cities.

The merger of Qazkom and Halyk Bank will be completed by the end of this year, said Chairman of the Kazakh National Bank Daniyar Akishev during a Feb. 22 online conference. "Currently, the process of merging the two banks continues. From the information that was brought to us by the management, they plan to complete it by the end of 2018. We hope that this schedule will be kept. But this is a complex process; large financial institutions are merging. It may take longer," said Akishev. The merger will be done after passing all necessary procedures, including appropriate coordination with regulatory bodies. Earlier Head of Halyk Bank Umur Shayakhmetova noted that after five months of painstaking work with international consultants, it could be confidently asserted that the potential of the deal is huge, both in scope and in terms of the impact on the economy of Kazakhstan and neighbouring countries.

A plant to produce mixed feeders and premixes is planned to be built in the Martuk district of the Aktobe region, according to the press service of the region's administration. The construction of AgroSoyuz M plant worth \$17.7 million was discussed at a meeting of Region Akim (Governor) Berdybek Saparbayev with Ambassador of Slovakia Peter Juza. During the meeting, the parties also discussed strengthening and expanding bilateral cooperation, increasing trade and implementing joint projects.

Around 2,300 rail cars of a new modification will be manufactured in the Pavlodar region, according to inform.kz. "Last year, with the support of the government, the issue on the resumption of production at Kazakhstan Rail Car Building Company was resolved, which had been idle for the last two years," said Region Governor Bulat Bakauov at a meeting with residents. "The launch of this enterprise allowed to ensure the growth of the machine-building industry by 1.2 times."

The first Volvo dealer centre has opened in Almaty. It is the first one not only in Kazakhstan, but in Central Asia. "This is a new house for Volvo. This is a responsible and important step for us. We promise our customers not only to sell, but also to provide service at Astana Motors. For this year, we plan to sell 60-100 cars," said Astana Group Head Nurlan Smagulov. The new Volvo dealer centre offers 3S services, which stands for sales, service and spare parts. As it was said at the presentation, Astana Motors Company is confident that Volvo will certainly win the hearts of Kazakh customers with its main priority in the production of technological, innovative and progressive cars, focused primarily on safety and comfort.

Alageum Electric expands export borders

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Alageum Electric, one of Kazakhstan's major electrical engineering companies, offers a wide range of products and services. The company not only provides power transformers to the domestic market, but also exports them abroad. The new plant opened this year will strengthen its positions in the Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan markets.

"There was a demand for 20-kilovolt power transformers in Kazakhstan's market. This niche of the market was filled by import suppliers, because domestic producers had no such products. Our specialists have successfully developed energy-saving power transformers with improved technical characteristics and introduced them into production," said exports department director Yevgeniy Bocharov.

"Today, there are two enterprises oriented for export in the structure of our holding, Kentau Transformer Plant with a 36-percent export share and Ural Transformer Plant with a share of exports reaching 96 percent. We do not intend to simply dwell on this. We are already building a new plant (Asia Trafo) for the production of power transformers in Shymkent. The plant will use

the most advanced equipment. The launch is scheduled for the beginning of the second half of this year. The plant will create 220 new jobs," he added.

Bocharov noted the 17.5 billion tenge (US\$54 million) project, supported by the Development Bank of Kazakhstan, aims to export power transformers abroad. He added Kazakh Invest supports Alageum Electric to develop its export potential.

With its own dealer network, specialised production bases and warehouses in all Kazakh regions, the company aims to save consumers' time and money, offering solutions on a turn-key basis. Solutions include design, producing electrical products, supplying industrial equipment and service and wiring and commissioning services.

Alageum Electric represents the interests of the following domestic manufacturers of goods and services with subsequent service and warranty services – PromEnerg Design Institute (power facilities design), Kentau and Ural transformer plants (transformer and electrical product production), Almaty Electromechanical Plant (cabinet unit manufacturer) and Electromontazh (electrical installation and commissioning services).

With this potential, the company constructs and maintains 10,

20, 35, 110, 220 and 500-kilovolt substations and power lines. It has received awards such as Best Supplier (2012), Best Business Partner and Most Dynamic Company in the Machinery Industry (2011).

Alageum Electric's Ural Transformer Plant is one of the largest enterprises in the West Kazakhstan region, exporting more than 90 percent of its output to Russia. The facility has been recognised by the Kazakh government as an export-oriented, high-tech and science-intensive enterprise with a high production culture.

High quality and reliable products are created using the most up-to-date and high-tech equipment from LAE, Gasparini and Taiss (Italy), Huebers and Stolberg (Germany), Tuboly (Switzerland), Soenen (Belgium) and Prima Power (Finland).

Alageum Electric has successfully finished projects at facilities in the oil refining, non-ferrous and ferrous metallurgy, chemical and nuclear industries. The company has worked on the power supply at the Kazakh President's residence and Parliament building, constructed substations and the Kum-Kol-Akshabulak overhead line, North Kazakhstan-Aktobe region interregional high-voltage line, Kenkiyak-Kumkol oil pipeline overhead line and others.

Kazakh, French cooperation produces cement plant

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – The Jambyl Cement plant near Mynaral in the Zhambyl region, the first in Kazakhstan to use the dry method for cement production, is currently the largest facility in the category. The joint Kazakh-French project, managed by Vicat Group, produces approximately 1.4 million tonnes of binder per year to cover 15 percent of internal demand and exports a portion to neighbouring countries.

Plant construction began in 2008 and was launched three years later.

"In the strategy of internationalisation, Vicat Group has been looking with interest at Kazakhstan since 2005 or earlier. Many prospective projects were examined and our technical and financial teams worked locally for a couple of years in assessing how to better set up our first cement plant in Kazakhstan," said Vicat Group Country Manager in Kazakhstan and Jambyl Cement director Pietro Cala.

In late 2007, Vicat Group became part of a project to establish a cement plant in Mynaral, a village on the shores of Balkhash Lake 400 kilometres from Almaty. The site was considered to be ideally located along the main Almaty-Astana route and, to date, has offered easy access to the country's main construction markets, he noted.

"At the beginning of 2011, the plant started operating and soon the company stepped into the market by offering first-class products very appreciated by the most demanding customers. Very quickly, cement produced and sold by Jambyl Cement became popular and covered 15 percent of the country consumption," he added.

The plant produces 400 and 500 quality grade Portland cement using the dry method, according to Vicat Group's website. Compared to the wet method, which is widely used in Kazakhstan, the dry method

promises to generate substantial energy savings and represents the best practices for the environment.

Since its opening, more than 250 direct jobs and at least 450 indirect employment opportunities have been created for area citizens.

The company is investing heavily in recruiting and training local specialists, according to Kazakh Invest, building apartments in the surrounding area which allow employees to live closer to work. The move is in line with Vicat's corporate culture, a long-standing tradition dating to 1817 when French engineer Luis Vicat invented artificial cement.

"Our group has provided not only financial resources and technical skills for this project, but also organisation, management culture and international relationships," said Cala.

He noted the company's objectives are related to proximity to clients, reactivity, innovation and a strong sense of belonging.

"We think we make decisions and we act having only long-term objectives in mind and we do care about resources and sustainability. It is not by chance that the group has almost two centuries of history; not many companies, nor many of our competitors have the same track record," he added.

Vicat's goal in Kazakhstan is establishing a company which will operate for at least a century and contribute to national development and infrastructure. To that end, Jambyl Cement must be financially self-sufficient and autonomous and able over time to renew and improve its industrial tools, said Cala.

"I look forward to the fact that a French company like us operating in Kazakhstan can be considered as a reliable partner for the country and for its citizens. In this sense, having the two cultures closer and with more understanding of each other can be a good way to realise this integration," he added.

NabasFabrik to export feathers to Europe

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

ASTANA – Kostanai-based NabasFabrik will begin exporting feathers to European Union (EU) countries for the first time in the nation's history. The regional administration is doing everything possible to reduce bureaucratic red tape and register additional companies with the right to export to the EU and China.

"In June, as a result of inspections conducted and negotiations with the European Commission, NabasFabrik fluff and feather, located in the Kostanai region, is included in the EU registry. This gives the company the right to export fluff and feather to the EU," said Kostanai regional veterinary inspection head Urazbek Batyrbekov at a recent administration meeting, according to Kazinform.

Elsewhere, a Chinese delegation

visited the region last spring to study the state veterinary system and determine the willingness of slaughter stations to ship goods to the Chinese market under domestic products export.

"Based on the results of the assessment of the inspection work regarding the issue of permits for the export of meat to China, two slaughter stations were included in the register of enterprises that have right to export frozen mutton to China," said Batyrbekov.

He added inspections are completed and a number of measures have been taken to optimise the process of issuing export documents. Proposals were made to a number of regulatory bodies and the number of legal acts through authorised bodies was decreased. In addition, due to the support of the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs a variety of necessary documents has been ex-

cluded and the terms for issuing veterinary permits reduced.

In particular, Batyrbekov said inspections are performed on a permanent basis to register Kostanai companies to export domestic products to Eurasian Economic Union countries. To date, 235 regional enterprises have been inspected and included in the corresponding registers.

Bank Astana introduces loans for SMEs

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – Bank Astana recently introduced microbusiness loans for entrepreneurs, reported Forbes.kz. The loans are up to 3 million tenge (US\$9,330) for a maximum of 24 months.

Kazakhstan's one million individual entrepreneurs often lack their due attention, said Bank Astana Managing Director Aidos Zhumagulov, as the bigger focus is on large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises. As a result, the bank's development strategy encompasses microbusiness loans.

"We are not launching the product if all business processes have still not been worked out, starting from application submission to giving a loan and subsequent services after the loan is received. We were all working last year on automating the processes, developing a scoring model, integrating our systems into different platforms and implementing tablet solutions," he told Forbes.kz.

The bank tested the product in several regions to get preliminary observations on quality and possible drawbacks to be ready to announce a full-scale launch this year.

"Global Finance" named Bank Astana as Kazakhstan's best digital bank last year, and it has been making every effort to live up to

the name. Nearly 700,000 cards have been issued and delivered across Kazakhstan, said Zhumagulov. All services are digitised, as they do not require a person to visit the bank, and the microbusiness product follows the same mechanism.

An entrepreneur can submit an application online, including his personal identification number and contact details. Within a maximum of ten minutes, he or she can learn whether the business is eligible for a loan.

If approved, the required documents are sent to the bank online, where bank officers confirm the business. The online committee then completes the process, which takes a total of one-two days.

The bank received more than 8,000 applications worth 13 billion tenge (US\$40.43 million) in two weeks in January. Zhumagulov noted with the "right approach and work in digital format," the numbers show good potential.

"One of the benefits of a digital approach is that we can target online traffic towards thousands of clients in regions based on product demand. This means we no longer need to go outside and give out booklets. We manage Internet traffic in real time. All of these processes are due to the bank's strong IT team, which enables us to build and integrate these solutions. This is really important in the digital era," he added.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Kazakhstan well on its way to gender equality

In the 12 months since International Women's Day was last celebrated across the world, we have witnessed sharp reminders of how far the world remains from true gender equality.

Campaigns to expose sexual violence and harassment in the work-place and end the injustice of women being paid less than men have underlined how unacceptable behaviour and attitudes remain in even the most developed societies and high-profile industries.

Such unfair – and at times criminal – practices cause great personal harm and suffering. This would be more than enough reason for all of us, whatever our gender, to work to root them out. But such attitudes, of course, are also very damaging both to the strength of economies and the health of societies.

More than ever before, the nations that succeed will be those who make the most of the potential of all their citizens regardless of gender or background. It is another reason why the fight for gender equality must be a cause for everyone.

This is certainly recognised here in Kazakhstan where gender equality is seen as both a human and economic right. It is why the government, for example, has worked closely with UN experts to tackle violence against women through better education and improved legal and social responses.

In the economy, removing barriers to gender equality is also seen as critical to our ambitions to join the ranks of the 30 most-developed countries. Like countries across the world, there are plenty of obstacles to overcome in tackling prejudice, modernising attitudes and putting in place the right remedies. But in terms of public and economic life, Kazakhstan is moving in the right direction with policies designed to accelerate the speed of progress.

Women, for example, now make up more than one in five of those elected to our parliament. Not good enough but better than the proportion in many other developed countries and more than twice the number just a decade ago. Even more impressive is that women now chair half of the Senate committees.

Within the wider machinery of govern-

ment, too, women are rightly taking the reins. The face Kazakhstan presents to the world is increasingly female. More than one of three officers in our foreign service are women who occupy over 20 senior diplomatic positions.

The number of women in public life is a trend seen at the local as well as national level. It is one of the reasons why, as we pointed out last year, Kazakhstan was ranked higher than both the United States and Japan in the global Girls' Opportunity Index drawn up by Save the Children.

While there are areas we must do better, Kazakhstan also scores well in terms of overall employment and economic opportunity. In this category in the World Economic Gender Gap report, the country was ranked 31st. Even more impressive is the progress being made to ensure women can play their full role in creating the businesses and jobs of the future.

National figures show that women make up over half of our country's individual entrepreneurs and head four out of ten of small and medium sized businesses. These SMEs which already employ a third of the national workforce will be in Kazakhstan as they are in all countries the main drivers of job creation and prosperity in the coming decades. It is why extra funding and support is being provided at both national and regional level to support them.

The priority given to education to equip Kazakhstan's young population with the knowledge and skills they will need is also vital. Removing formal or informal barriers which stop talented women studying, seeking or advancing in careers in science and technology must be an important goal for Kazakhstan. We have plenty of raw material on which to build, as the success of the all-female team of school pupils in winning Google's global Technovation Challenge in California in September shows.

While families enjoy the festivities of celebrating Women's Day here in Kazakhstan, it is the serious issues of gender equality and how to provide a safe and supportive environment where everyone can succeed, which must continue to be the prime focus of our society. Scandals overseas underline why there must be no complacency.

YBYRAI Young Programmers' League – first step in world of high technologies

By Aziza Shuzheyeva

In the digital era, the rapid development of which we are now witnessing, everything is changing: the economy, the state system and even society. At the forefront today are people who have the skills of the future and who can easily navigate the digital world. Many countries of the world at the state level support the development of human capital, as they understand that a population without digital literacy cannot enjoy all the opportunities that the digital economy opens up for it.

The level of computer literacy in Kazakhstan for 2017 was 76.2 percent. Of course, for mass involvement of citizens of the country in the digitisation of the economy, there is a need to increase this number not only on a quantitative, but also on a qualitative level.

Much attention is paid to teaching children digital skills. Already in the primary classes across the country, children are acquainted with basic knowledge of modern information technologies.

According to the Kazakh Ministry of Education and Science, in 2014-2016, 14,500 educational grants were allocated for training specialists in ICT (information and communications technology) specialties and the output for the same period was 94,000 people.

Despite this, there is still a shortage of IT specialists in the country, as digitisation processes are developing much faster than our requirements for training specialists are changing.

The Digital Kazakhstan state programme adopted in December 2017 has set a whole new direction devoted to the development of human capital, where many initiatives and activities to increase the population's digital literacy are outlined.

One of the initiatives involves the



introduction of the Fundamentals of Programming courses in the school curriculum, starting from the second grade. This should contribute to the development of children's creative abilities and critical thinking.

To unite the initiatives of the state and business in the development of the intellectual generation of Kazakhstan, as well as to support the idea of forming Digital Kazakhstan, a group of enthusiasts initiated the creation of the YBYRAI Young Programmers Public Foundation, which funds the Programme Your Future social project.

Programme Your Future is the first project of the foundation, which envisions creation of a network of free classes in Kazakhstan teaching children programming and IT skills.

The first such school for programming for children was opened on June 17, 2017 by Bagdat Mussin, chairperson of the committee on legal statistics and special accounting at the Office of the Prosecutor General, during the 60th anniversary of the city of Ekibastuz in Pavlodar region.

In addition, today there are five more programming courses operational in the cities of Kokshetau, Semey, and Zhezkazgan. More than 100 children have received training in the first module of the programme since the courses

opened. All IT classes are equipped with the necessary number of computers and have access to the Internet. Children do not need to have any special skills to be enrolled in the programme; they only need to be able to turn the computer on and off.

The Love to Code international educational franchise in the field of programming has been chosen as a teaching method at the YBYRAI Young Programmers' League public foundation.

The training is designed for kids aged 8-16 years. Courses take place in small groups of up to eight children three times a week. The duration of each lesson is one hour. The programme currently includes three modules. The first module is the study of the Scratch free visual programming language and online community for children and the CodeMonkey online game that teaches children how to code; the second module is designed for kids over 12 years old and for those who have passed the first module where they learn algorithms for CoffeeScript. In the third module, children will begin to study the basics of developing websites: HTML/CSS. Next, the programme will be expanded to include the study of Python, a programming language, and the development of games for mobile devices and computers. The duration of one module takes an average of two-three months. From the first day of the course, children will start creating games or animations. After the third module is completed, they will design and develop their own websites.

The YBYRAI public fund plans to replicate the Programme My Future project throughout Kazakhstan, including in the rural areas.

The author is head of the YBYRAI Youth League of Young Programmers.

Radicalisation, drug trafficking, environment are key EU-Central Asia security challenges, say experts and officials

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – Fighting terrorism and extremism, including radicalisation, tackling drug and arms trafficking as well as environment and water management issues are among key security challenges faced by the European Union (EU) and Central Asia, according to experts who gathered Feb. 22-23 in Astana for the international conference marking the 25th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the EU and Central Asia.

Director of Sharq Research Centre in Tajikistan Muzaffar Olimov pointed out the Central Asian region is at the intersection of global interests.

"The region is located close to a hotbed of instability and conflict bearing all negative processes happening in the neighbouring region and beyond," said Olimov, referring to the worsening situation in Afghanistan and radicalisation processes as main security challenges.

The challenge for both the EU and the five Central Asian nations, Olimov noted, is in finding the balance between the human dimension and security and, in particular, between "fighting violent extremism and respect for human rights."

"The problem is very evident in radicalisation of migrants. Over the past years, the assumption was formed that migrants are vulnerable to religious radicalisation. Research shows that more than 80 percent of the Central Asian migrants were recruited while working as labour migrants," reported Olimov.

Radicalisation could be ex-



Panelists from the European Union and Central Asia at the international conference marking the 25th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the EU and Central Asia in Astana.

plained by social reasons, he said. These include inequality, poverty, discrimination, low level of education and of participation in the political decision-making process and crisis identity common for labour migrants.

"All of these factors relate to Central Asian migrants," he added. "It remains unclear what factors motivate potential radicals to commit to violent extremism and terrorism and accept violence as a means to achieve political goals."

There are, however, other factors contributing to radicalisation, said Olimov, including poor religious knowledge prompting people, especially young ones, seek knowledge outside as well as strong state control of religion that makes people hide their religious practices and affiliation.

Head of Department for Turkey, Caucasus and Central Asia at the Polish Centre for Eurasian Studies

Krzysztof Strachota also brought the issue of terrorism up at the panel discussion. "The level of terrorism activity is low in the region, but at the same time several terrorist attacks across the world were found to be prepared by people coming from the Central Asian region," he noted.

Similar to his colleagues, Deputy Director of Uzbek Institute of Strategic and Interregional Studies Botir Tursunov emphasised radicalisation as a salient issue.

"It has acquired a global dimension that penetrates almost all societies regardless of the level of socio-economic development, cultural religious affiliation of countries and regions," said Tursunov, stressing the problem demands a constructive dialogue.

The definition of extremism and terrorism, he noted, is still unclear serving as a fundamental obstacle to finding the solution on a global level.

Tursunov noted the region man-

aged to maintain peace and stability throughout the most difficult period in its history. Common willingness to maintain and promote stability and sustainable development has become a "more realistic goal than ever before," he added, and the agreement to hold the Central Asia leaders' meeting soon in Kazakhstan is a testament to that.

"Central Asia security is an integral part of global security," he added, yet impossible to achieve and sustain without stabilising the situation in Afghanistan. Settling the long, protracted conflict in Afghanistan represents a "strategic opportunity" for the region to fully tap into economic cooperation and trade potential, according to Tursunov.

Lack of transport and communication infrastructure is another problem, according to the Uzbek researcher. "This hampers the full integration into the structure of economic relations increasing the

vulnerability of nations to external threats and challenges," he explained.

This corresponds to one of Kazakhstan's suggestions for the new EU Strategy on Central Asia expected to be ready in 2019 voiced earlier the same day by Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov.

In his opening remarks at the conference, the minister highlighted the importance of transforming the region into a major transport and transit hub with a broader goal of achieving the region's comprehensive integration in global processes.

Drug trafficking has long been on the security agenda of the region and beyond and the EU has assisted the countries with its Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP) launched in 2001. "In this respect, the EU has a very strong interest in the promotion of security and stability in Central Asia and establishing reliable and mutually beneficial partnerships with the countries in the region," said CADAP Regional Team Leader Ernest Robello.

Robello noted the project helps countries develop drug policies and drug demand reduction, an issue of "common concern."

"For instance, in Kazakhstan, we supported it in the development of its 2030 national strategy, drug programme in Kyrgyzstan adopted in 2014, national drug prevention programme in Tajikistan, the 2016-2020 national strategy in Turkmenistan and the programme of complex measures on countering drug abuse and illicit trafficking in Uzbekistan," he noted.

Drug trafficking no longer re-

quires vast territories to produce drugs, said Robello. "These new types of drugs, new target groups, new communication trends in society, for example social media, demand new approaches, new forms of treatment and new prevention approaches," he added.

The environment is also on the security agenda for the EU and Central Asia. Executive Director of Central Asia Regional Environment Centre Iskander Abdullaev pointed out environmental problems trigger problems in other areas and this requires bringing more stakeholders to address the acute problems, including the EU.

"Environment and water cooperation platform, which the EU chairs, is a very important platform where five countries come together," he added.

"All these problems, water challenges, land degradation, biodiversity, degradation of environment in cities, air pollution, climate change look like a vicious circle if you look from the point of a single country, but as a region, there are a lot of opportunities," he noted, stressing limited cooperation incurs significant costs. For instance, limited cooperation in water management cost \$4 million annually and land degradation between 2001 and 2009 cost \$5.85 billion.

The challenge, however, is growing demographic pressure in the region, which requires significant resources. Outdated infrastructure as well as outdated institutions and policies, he said, also impede the progress in the field and the governments should step up efforts in updating environmental laws and regulations.

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Digital Kazakhstan: transforming through modern technology

By Ruslan Yensebayev

The Digital Kazakhstan state programme was approved in December 2017. It is an important programme that aims to improve the standard of living of every Kazakh citizen through the use of digital technologies. The plan is to implement the programme within five years from 2018 until 2022 in five key areas: digitisation of the economy, transition to digital government, implementation of the Digital Silk Road, human capital development and creating an innovation ecosystem. Within these five areas, there are 17 specific goals and 120 projects.

In the economy digitisation sphere, the aim is to increase productivity in all sectors. Digital Mine is one of the most significant projects – this information system collects data through sensors installed on the equipment, provides



optimal production processes, monitors reagent consumption, reduces equipment downtime and quickly identifies and eliminates emergency situations.

Another area is the transition to digital government. We aim to digitise the activities of governmental bodies, reduce paperwork, increase citizen participation in state governance and implement the Smart City technology. One of the examples is Sergek (Vigilant), a system for monitoring the obser-

vance of traffic rules. It was introduced recently and is expected to improve the observance of traffic rules. When the system registers a traffic offense, it automatically generates a protocol and sends it to the violator's address. Another aim is to implement a project on creating operational management centres for Kazakhstan's small towns. Thus, not only large cities, but also mono-towns will be equipped with new technologies, which will lead to a decrease in the level of crime and offenses.

The expansion of communication networks and ICT infrastructure, as well as strengthening cybersecurity is the third and no less important sphere of the programme – the implementation of the Digital Silk Road. From 2018 to 2020, 2,616 rural settlements will be provided with broadband access to the internet. The initiative includes modernising the satellite communication

system, providing fibre-optic communication lines to remote settlements, increasing the transit capacity and improving digital television and radio broadcasting network.

Developing human capital is the fourth area. Its goal is to update the education system in accordance with the best world practices. One of the projects to be implemented is on updating secondary education programmes by introducing new programming languages and STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] elements. Elements of robotics, virtual reality, 3D printing, among others, will be introduced to the curriculum. This area also includes a project on conducting training courses for the population on developing basic digital skills. Retraining will allow our citizens to meet professional standards and remain in demand.

The final area – creating an in-

novative ecosystem – also has specific tasks identified. Those include supporting innovative development sites, promoting technological entrepreneurship and start-up culture, attracting venture financing and creating demand for innovation. The Astana Hub international start-up hub is a vivid example. It is expected to provide domestic IT specialists and start-ups with an opportunity to start developing their projects today.

Only two months have passed since the adoption of the Digital Kazakhstan programme. However, our citizens are already observing tangible results. There are new means of navigation that help reduce the time spent on a trip and choose the most optimal routes. There are applications that help find almost any goods.

There is a successfully operating digital farm in the North Kazakhstan region, where a computer automatically calculates the volumes

of feed and the time of feeding. First, it reduces the costs for personnel maintenance, and secondly, it increases production efficiency.

There are also tangible results in healthcare: computer equipment in medical institutions constitutes 81.3 percent and access to the Internet is provided to 55.6 percent of medical institutions.

An electronic health passport is being created for each patient, which will allow the patient's entire medical history to be stored online. First results of this and other initiatives are already evident despite the fact that the programme was adopted just two months ago.

It is noteworthy that President Nursultan Nazarbayev stressed that the implementation of the Digital Kazakhstan state programme is the government's main task.

The author is Chairman of the Zerde National Infocommunication Holding.

New humanitarian knowledge under Fourth Industrial Revolution

By Rauan Kenzhekhanuly

In April 2017, a policy article "Course towards the future: modernisation of Kazakhstan's identity" by President Nursultan Nazarbayev was published. Among many, there is one specific project called New Humanitarian Knowledge. 100 New Textbooks in the Kazakh Language, which envisages the translation and introduction of the best international educational literature into the programmes of Kazakh universities.

A special entity, the National Translation Bureau, has been established to implement this important project.

Under the project, about 20 textbooks on the humanities written by distinguished authors and published by the world's leading universities have already been translated and will be published soon.

When setting the task for this unique project, President Nazarbayev rightly noted that "for many years, our social and humanitarian knowledge had been constrained within the framework of one doctrine and one worldview."

Indeed, one of the dire consequences of the total unification of science in the USSR was the destruction of the entire system of humanitarian knowledge. Many



distinguished scientists in the humanities were forced to leave the country while those who stayed faced repressions and persecution. Unable to resist, some backtracked on truth and complied with the regime. Subsequently, the humanities in the Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan, for many decades existed in a vacuum, in isolation from the global humanitarian scientific process.

But the collapse of the USSR and Kazakhstan's subsequent independence did not bring an instant boost into the humanities in our country. The consequences of "constraining the humanitarian thought within the framework of a single doctrine" turned out to be very profound. A quarter of a century has passed, yet we are still in the process of creating our own mature national environment for humanitarian sciences, conceptual

and research apparatus, qualified teaching staff for the universities and professional translators.

President Nazarbayev's initiative to publish best textbooks in the humanities creates a unique opportunity to accelerate the development of this branch of science in Kazakhstan.

Through the translation of the best of educational and scientific literature, we are able to bring the content and level of discourse in our classrooms to international levels in the shortest possible time. In turn, Kazakh teachers and researchers will have a chance to join the world scientific community.

It is no secret that the modern world is rapidly changing and all changes dictated by the development in engineering represent an unprecedented challenge to the liberal arts. Internet and social media, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, unmanned military and civilian technology generate a whole complex of new philosophical, psychological, ethical-moral and linguistic-cultural problems. Modern humanitarian science is developing in search of answers to the questions and challenges of a new time. We must rise and become a part of this process. This is where we see the goal of the "New Humanitarian Knowledge" project.

One cannot build an artificial in-

telligence without understanding the linguistic problems underlying the formation of thought processes. It is also impossible to use driverless vehicles on the roads without solving emerging ethical issues. All this collectively leads to the idea that technological development and the adequate use of its achievements are closely related to the development of the humanities.

At the same time, under the influence of across-the-board digitisation and the fourth industrial revolution, the importance of humanities in the eyes of modern business and political elite seems to have significantly receded. Some authors, as well as education and science officials, often question whether the humanities will survive in this modern world.

But those pondering the opposite question sound more reasonable: can the modern world survive without the humanities?

Humanities are essential for an adequate understanding of the surrounding world and for a healthy development of the individual and society as a whole. The task for the humanities is the formation of a full-fledged, morally developed person, capable of making responsible decisions and creating for the common good.

The tasks of the humanities are fundamentally different from the

The selection, quality translation, substance-wise and literary expertise, as well as organisation of effective introduction of new textbooks into the educational process are extremely important tasks and the mission of the entire educational and humanitarian community.

functions inherent in the natural sciences.

Natural science and courses in technologies cannot form such human qualities as patriotism, morality, work ethics, etc. It is important not only to create technology, but also to understand for whose benefit it is created.

The upbringing of a good person and the formation of a good citizen are impossible without the humanities that take into account the spirit of the times. After all, the formation of an individual is not a technical task, but a task of a philosophical and moral order.

Humanities do not aim to create profits or increase national wealth. However, only the humanities can point to the possible negative and sometimes destructive consequences of scientific and technological progress, determine the underly-

ing causes of the economic, social, cultural and moral degradation of a society, or an emerging global environmental catastrophe.

Therefore, the task of the New Humanitarian Knowledge project goes beyond the scope of translation and publishing. The selection, quality translation, substance-wise and literary expertise, as well as organisation of effective introduction of new textbooks into the educational process are extremely important tasks and the mission of the entire educational and humanitarian community.

Only by creating a strong spiritual support and through realisation of our own place in the history, can we think of reaching the heights where the human has not yet set foot.

The author is Director of the National Translation Bureau.

Linguistic taste of time

By Aizhan Kartayeva and Lyutsiya Abdullina

Linguistic scholars rarely step into the spotlight of the nation's historic events. Their everyday research work is routine and monotonous and may seem boring and ordinary for an amateur: correlation of linguistic facts, language mechanisms and analogies based on archival materials, etc. At the decisive stages of history, however, a dialogue of experts turns into a large discussion platform.

Different opinions have been expressed about the transition of the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin script, which can be viewed as evidence of the democratic spirit of the era. There were objections from the philistine based on stereotypes and the inertia of the consciousness: the old is correct by default.

Linguists, in addition to highly technical issues, study the relationship between language as a system and language as an activity.

The language system itself inherently stores the representation of an individual and his or her ability to mentally perceive and process external information about the world, the language and the texts themselves.

"A linguistic taste of time," if using an expression by a famous linguist, is currently determined by its communicative approach. We live every minute "participating in a dialogue" and the productivity



Aizhan Kartayeva



Lyutsiya Abdullina

competitive, attractive to consumers and correspond to the current situation.

We have not yet forgotten the time when the older generation saw an infringement of their rights because of the transition to a single state language. And the youth, more receptive to the "habitat" and guided by pragmatism and the societal demand, took a quick shift and began to learn the language.

One needs to study Russia's experience: representatives of ethnic groups that call it home speak and study Russian. Today, however, many of them are driven not only by the desire to connect with the cultural heritage the Russian language preserves, but to gain a competitive advantage in career options.

Experts from university schools where Russian is taught as a foreign language say that the primary motivation to study it is an economic one: fluency in Russian

standing, "an expert in a rare skill" is an "expert in demand" and as a result a well-paid one.

Economics is increasingly referred to as a branch of the humanities. Kazakhstan's programme of multilingualism well meets the challenges of today's time: only by earning "linguistic capital" and investing in a personal "language basket" can one accomplish maximum success in a professional career. Modernisation of national identity first and foremost means an "overhaul" of the mind embedded in stereotypes that are framed in persistent verbal formulas.

By recognising the Latin script as "the main language of the digital era of the world" and choosing for its own language a script already utilised by many languages of the world, Kazakhstan is making another civilisational breakthrough in order to be an equal partner in the space of advanced knowledge, scientific achievements, techno-

logical progress and people's digital communication.

Why is the switch of the Kazakh language into Latin script a serious argument in favour of securing the nation's spiritual unity? Even within a single Turkic language family (in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) we can understand each other when speaking, but not when reading.

It is quite natural that in light of international economic crisis we all are concerned about the cost of this switch. But keep in mind that any new product entering the market requires investments in advertising and promotion that sometimes represent a considerable amount of resources. The return on investment starts showing up only after years of the goods being sold in the market.

It is not for the first time that the young nation asserts itself through revolutionary and ambitious projects. The construction of the new capital was mostly perceived and assessed as an inexpedient and costly experiment. Yet today, Astana is a national brand recognised by the international community.

What are the priority tasks assigned to the nation's linguists and researchers? First of all, each of us realises the degree of professional responsibility imposed by the time and by the state. Participation in the development of a language requires appropriate qualification and balanced explanatory work both among experts with professional background and a new generation

of researchers. After a number of thorough linguistic studies, discussions by authoritative researchers and methodologists-practitioners at various professional fora, a set of specific tasks for further language development on the national scale has been formulated, namely the development of rules for orthography and orthoepy (rules of correct pronunciation) of the Kazakh alphabet in Latin script; the development of teaching methods and their gradual introduction into the educational system; systematisation of the terminological corpus of the Kazakh language in Latin graphics and adaptation of the Latin-based language to IT technologies. These are all laborious and thorough processes which will undergo regular adjustments corrected by linguists.

Since 2003, East Kazakhstan State University has carried the name of a well-known linguist, Turkologist and one of the founders of Kazakh linguistics, Sarsen Amanzholov, who was also the developer and founder of Kazakh grammar, alphabet and spelling, the basic principles of Kazakh terminology and the foundations of Kazakh dialectology.

A dialogue platform created at the university has provided a new opportunity for expert discussions with prominent national scholars. A recent teleconference between scientists and students from four regions of the country has filled the participants with a spirit of solidarity and professional confi-

dence in the success of the future enormous work.

Both teachers and students at the School of Kazakh, Russian Philology and Journalism understand the full measure of responsibility for the ongoing processes. And the very fact of everyone's participation in the historical event of language development is perceived with a corresponding emotional upsurge.

Are the political decisions correlated with the logic of scientific evolution? A number of renowned linguists underline the necessity of building a new scientific paradigm with reliance on humanitarian technologies.

Humankind is standing on the doorstep of a new linguistics era that will give practical features to the humanities not by abolishing, but by fully revealing their specifics.

A humanitarian invention is a new humanitarian idea which includes the means of its implementation in the form of cultural practices, intellectual movements, creative organisations and forms of cooperation.

Undoubtedly, the transition to the Latin script will give a new impetus to promising scientific ideas for Kazakh linguists that will transform our nation's identity.

The authors are professors of linguistics at Sarsen Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

People are Kazakhstan's greatest asset, says Lithuanian ambassador

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – Lithuania celebrated Feb. 16 its 100th anniversary of independence restored after World War I. To highlight the date, Lithuanian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Vytautas Nauduzas told The Astana Times about the relationship between the countries, prospects for deepening cooperation and his opinion on Kazakhstan's development.

"A few days ago, Lithuania commemorated its 100th anniversary of its rebirth as an independent country. The statehood of Lithuania was established almost 800 years ago. Lithuanian kings and Lithuanian grand dukes together with Poland created Rzeczpospolita, which included Belorussia, Ukraine, some regions of Russia and some regions of eastern European countries. Thus, Rzeczpospolita united an impressive part of Eastern Europe in diversity for a long period. Nowadays, Lithuania is in great favour of a strong, stable relationship with neighbouring countries. Actually, when we speak about the jubilee, we should pay attention that a country is as wise as its values, not only years," he said.

Freedom, democracy and human rights were the reliable bases for Lithuania to join the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and other



Vytautas Nauduzas

international institutions, he said, as well as to emerge from austerity to prosperity, reach more than \$18,000 in per capita GDP and become the 19th most liberal economy in the world.

Last year, Kazakhstan and Lithuania marked the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations. Through the quarter century, the countries achieved significant successes in all areas of cooperation. The positions of both countries coincide on many international topics.

"Speaking about Kazakhstan and Lithuania, I must say that Kazakhstan is not a next-door country to Lithuania, but Kazakhstan is not too far away from ordinary countries to Lithuania because of historic reasons. Kazakhstan became the second native country for hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians who were

deported here after World War II. We are very grateful to the Kazakhstan people who saved the lives of our compatriots, including of my granddad who lived in Karaganda. So, even the best knowledge of geography and history would never replace the excellent model of relationship between Kazakhstan and Lithuania," he said.

The ambassador focused on the cooperation between the countries on the international level.

"In 2000, Lithuania joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO), followed by the membership of Kazakhstan in the same organisation later on. In 2010, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was under the chair of Kazakhstan, followed by the chairmanship of Lithuania in the same institution in 2011. In 2015, Lithuania held the membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC); today, Kazakhstan has the same status," he noted.

Within a few months, Lithuania is set to join the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Kazakhstan is also seeking to become a member and Nauduzas believes the action will occur in due time.

He once again congratulated Kazakhstan on the way in which it organised and conducted EXPO 2017. Lithuania's Romas Jankauskas was appointed as the event's chief commissioner.

"Last year, due to many things

we intensified our relationship. The turnover of foreign trade reached \$1.7 billion, much more than Kazakhstan has with many neighbouring countries. Good governance comes from freedom of communication and connectivity between two countries. We have good cooperation in transport and logistics," he noted.

The ambassador praised the country's efforts on construction of infrastructure for the Silk Way, East West Transport Corridor, Kuryk port and other facilities.

"Thus, the country will diminish its economic dependence on just mineral resources, because transport and logistics could give at least 10-15 percent of the GDP. During the few last decades, your region has dramatically and fundamentally changed. It has become much smaller, better interconnected, more comfortable and environmentally friendly. Transport could deliver sustainable rises, not crises of economic development of any country. Daily transport delivery straight to our homes is a modern quality of life in spite of borders between our countries. Lithuania, Poland, Latvia and Estonia might be very useful, because you can more easily realise the challenges of the logistics," he said.

Relations are dynamically developing between universities, including within the Bolashak International Scholarship programme.

Medical institutions have established effective mechanisms for sharing experience. Lithuanian doctors visit Kazakhstan to do sophisticated operations, especially for those with heart disease. Professor Rimantas Benetis, an outstanding Lithuanian cardiac surgeon, has saved many Kazakh lives.

Tourism will be enhanced beginning May 27 with the expected launch of direct flights between Astana and Vilnius by SCAT airlines.

"This will be very useful for both sides. I think it will attract people not only from Lithuania and Kazakhstan, but from neighbouring Central Asian and EU countries," said Nauduzas.

"High development is going on everywhere in Kazakhstan. I am sure that Shymkent will be the largest city in the future. Demographic trends show that the greatest increase of citizens is in Shymkent precisely," he added.

He also commented on the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin-based script.

"I believe that the transition of Kazakhstan to the Latin alphabet is a very correct, considered and consistent step. For foreign tourists, to whom you have opened your borders and who can visit your country without a visa, it is much easier to read and understand the meaning of words in Latin rather than in Cyrillic. The

transition to the Latin alphabet is not done at the expense of Cyrillic. The tolerance of Kazakhstan people towards other religions and other national minorities is praiseworthy," he noted.

Lithuania opened two honorary consulates in Almaty and Shymkent this year, raising the number within the country to eight.

"We cover all regions of Kazakhstan. Besides, we have the embassy in Astana and general consulate of Lithuania in Almaty. Additionally, we opened eight honorary consulates, but I would not call them consulates but powerful and reliable bridges between two countries. They are working efficiently," he added.

Nauduzas noted future plans are related to economic and trade cooperation, transport and logistics, chemistry, oil chemistry and many other sectors of the economy.

"Kazakhstan is an incredibly rich country. I would say that Kazakhstan does not have any chance to go bankrupt. Kazakhstan is so rich, not only in mineral resources; it is also rich in grain, agriculture, the metal sector, oil and gas, coloured metals and rare metals. However, the main diamonds of Kazakhstan are people. Here, people are well educated and trying to do their best. The rest Kazakhstan people can get by opening doors and trade much more with neighbouring and far away countries," he added.

Country joins Global Happiness Coalition

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recently formed the Global Happiness Coalition. Initiated by the UAE, the coalition aims to ensure effective international dialogue about achieving happiness on a global level, disseminate knowledge and exchange information and expertise to implement related policies between member countries.

The world needs coalitions that work for people's wellbeing and happiness, said UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

"The Global Happiness Coalition reflects the message where the United Arab Emirates' aspirations meet with the ambitions of different nations around the world towards creating a better future for everyone. It is time to join efforts as governments to come up with new approaches and mechanisms to achieve people's happiness and improve their quality of life," he noted.

The coalition was announced Feb. 12 during the sixth World Government Summit (WGS) in Dubai. The group will meet during the annual WGS to review achievements and exchange ideas that may help members improve policies and programmes to ensure happiness is sustained.

The agreement establishing the coalition was signed by Costa Rican Minister of National Planning and Economic Policy Olga Marta Sanchez Oviedo, Kazakh Minister of Information and Communication Dauren Abayev, Mexican President's Office head Francisco Guzman Ortiz, Portuguese Minister of Presidency and Administrative Modernisation Maria Manuel Leito Marques, Slovenian Minister of Development, Strategic Projects and Cohesion Alenka Smerkolj and UAE Minister of State for Happiness and Quality of Life Ohoud Khalfan Al Roumi.

"We perceive people's happiness as a benchmark for government efficiency and an important indicator in assessing its policies and programmes. It is also a common objective which both government and private sectors

collaborate to achieve," said Al Maktoum, according to WAM, the Emirates news agency.

He added the coalition is an opportunity for its members to exchange ideas and expertise and learn from UAE's experiences, as well as show its vision regarding the importance of happiness as the ultimate goal for any government. He suggested investing in happiness promotes security, peace and coexistence between nations.

"Happiness is the opposite of hatred and extremism. We look forward to the Global Happiness Coalition laying the foundation for a positive transformation in the world," he said.

First held in 2013, the WGS has turned into an event of international scale. The platform is used to present innovation projects, with the hope of ensuring breakthroughs in science and technology. More than 4,000 delegates from 140 countries, including the heads of international organisations and representatives of leading science and technology institutions and global technology corporations, took part in this year's event.

TCO reaches record-high production in 2017, seeks to expand in 2018

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – Last year was a milestone for Tengizchevroil (TCO), the Chevron-led joint venture operating the Tengiz oil and gas field in Atyrau region, as the company achieved a record-high 28.7 million tonnes in oil production. TCO General Director Ted Etchison reported the 2017 results and plans for 2018 during a recent press conference in Almaty.

TCO was formed by the Kazakh government and Chevron Corporation in April 1993. Kazakhstan currently holds a 20-percent stake through the KazMunayGas national oil and gas company, Chevron owns 50 percent, Exxon-Mobil owns 25 percent and Russian-American company LukArco owns 5 percent.

The company produced 27.56 million tonnes of crude in 2016, said Etchison, boosting oil production by 4.1 percent the following year. The figure included 1.38 million tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas, 7.45 billion cubic metres of dry gas and 2.49 million tonnes of sulphur.

June 2017 marked another milestone in TCO history, as the com-

pany produced its three billionth barrel of crude oil.

To date, TCO has contributed \$125 billion to the Kazakh economy, including salaries to local workers, purchasing \$24 billion in local goods and services, payments to state bodies and dividends to local partners, as well as taxes and royalty to the national budget, said Etchison. Payments reached \$8.5 billion in 2017.

"Oil prices drastically fell more than three years ago, which resulted in the decrease in payments to Kazakhstan starting in 2015. In 2017, however, the indicators were much better," he added.

The current production volume is not the limit, he noted. In July 2016, TCO partners announced the launch of the Future Growth (FGP) and Wellhead Pressure Management (WPMP) projects, which are expected to increase crude oil production by 12 million tonnes per year or 260,000 barrels per day. The cost of the expansion is estimated at \$36.8 billion.

WPMP will provide for the full load of the Tengiz plants' processing capacity by decreasing flowing wellhead pressures and boosting pressure at the six existing processing lines. FGP will incorporate

sour gas injection technology used during the company's previous expansion project.

"In 1992 and 1993, the focus was on initial production, but by then we were already considering possible sour gas injection technology. The questions we faced within this experiment included sour gas injection back into the reservoir, which on one hand is good for the environment and on the other will help boost production. We launched this pilot project in the mid-2000s and built what we now call the second generation plant. The experiment turned out to be very successful from a technical point of view," said Etchison.

Social responsibility remains vitally important for TCO, he added. The company has invested \$3 billion since 2000 to decrease negative consequences on the environment and managed to achieve a 70-percent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions per tonne of crude oil.

The company will continue its social infrastructure projects, which to date total \$1.4 billion in addition to the \$25 million allocated annually to its Iglilik voluntary social infrastructure project, said Etchison.

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Nation&Capital

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Kazakh singer named most popular singer of the year in China

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Skier's bronze medal more than 20 years in the making

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Competitive cheerleading gaining recognition abroad

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – Kazakhstan's cheerleading achievements are mounting and the sport is developing in the country. President of the country's Federation Union of Cheerleading and Cheer Sport (KUC) Ruslan Mammadov told The Astana Times.

Last year was a breakthrough year for Kazakhstan in cheerleading at the international level. A Kazakh team became the first among Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries to win a gold medal in the U.S., the homeland of cheerleading, in the International Cheerleading Union (ICU) World Championship.

Kazakhstan's cheerleading team also took the bronze at the Asia Championship in Japan and returned with silver medals from the South Korean World Beach Cheerleading Open Masters. Kazakhstan's athletes have gained experience at international competitions as an ICU member since 2009.

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Cheerleading and Cheer Sport team at the World Championship 2017, Orlando.

KazISS climbs seven spots in global think tank ranking

By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – The Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies (KazISS), the state institution providing research and analysis to President Nursultan Nazarbayev and the Kazakh government, climbed from 147th place to 140th in the 2017 Global To Go Think Tank Index Rankings. KazISS was ranked second among think tanks in Central Asia.

"The ranking is undoubtedly important for KazISS. For years we have been listed in separate nominations; however, only in 2016 did KazISS enter the general top think tank rankings. We are happy that we managed to move higher on the list in 2017," said deputy director Madina Nurgaliyeva.

The Global Go To Think Tank Index, produced by the Think Tanks & Civil Societies Programme at the University of Pennsylvania, aims to improve the performance of think tanks globally and raise awareness about their role in governments and civil societies.

The 2017 report, published Jan. 31, is the programme's 11th. It assessed 7,815 think tanks according to 30 criteria, including quality of management and staff; academic performance and reputation; and quality, number and reach of publications. The index also considers the application of a think tank's work in policy making and the level, diversity and stability of its funding.

Around 7,800 think tanks are working across the globe with 1,872

institutions in the U.S., 512 in China and 444 in the United Kingdom. Out of 28 think tanks in Kazakhstan, KazISS was the only one to be ranked 140 among top global non-US institutions, compared to being 147th in 2016. The leading positions were held by the eminent French Institute of International Relations, Bruegel and Chatham House.

The index also ranks think tanks by region. Central Asia and the Caucasus region were combined, and KazISS was assessed second among the 65 regional think tanks ranked, after the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) in Azerbaijan. The Economic Research Institute, the Centre for Strategic and Military Research, the National Analytical

Centre and 10 other Kazakh institutions were also on the list.

The ranking also lists think tanks in 55 nominations. In a list of top defence and national security think tanks, KazISS in 91st place was the only representative of Central Asia. The Kazakh think tank also took 28th place among top energy and resources policy centres and 57th position among the best government-affiliated institutions.

KazISS, founded by Nazarbayev on June 16, 1993, celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. The institute provides opinions on political and economic issues as well as private analysis for authorities. Its main research areas include social, political and economic developments in Kazakhstan and beyond, as well as international affairs and foreign policy.

The institute cooperates with local universities and think tanks in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates and publishes academic and analytical journals in Kazakh, Russian and English quarterly.

Garage incubator selects 14 projects ahead of Astana Hub accelerator launch

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – The Kazakh capital recently hosted the launch of Garage incubator seeking to provide a platform for start-up development ahead of the upcoming launch of Astana Hub accelerator programme in September. With more than 150 applications, only best 14 were selected for the incubator.

Garage is a free start-up incubator offering developers and innovators business courses, a team of mentors and advisers, assistance in development and marketing, workspace and a network of investors and companies.

The Garage incubator is a "small, yet very significant step"

into the world of new ideas and digital technologies, according to Kazakh Minister of Information and Communication Dauren Abayev, who attended the launch.

Speaking about the Astana Hub, he noted it embodies key priorities set out by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev ranging from Eurasian integration to human capital development.

"For example, the High Technologies Park in Minsk enables Belarus companies to export IT products worth up to \$1 billion annually. Technological development in Estonia started from the creation of Skype in 2003. We could talk all the time about the Silicon Valley, which hosts more than 10,000 companies, or start-

up eco systems in London, Beijing and New York. But it is high time to establish our own breakthrough product," said Abayev.

The project programme is intensive and lasts three months, according to the organisers, and incorporates Steve Blank's Lean Start-up approach and experience of incubators in Singapore, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Malaysia. It empowers entrepreneurs with basic needs to turn their idea into a minimal viable product, prepare them for the next development stage acceleration programme and attract private investments.

Mentors are among the project's key features, as they include current business people who can share

first-hand experience with start-ups.

Once the programme is completed, its participants will present their projects on Demo Day, which is an opportunity for entrepreneurs to find investors.

Most of the projects selected for the incubator are software startups.

For instance, the Kompra project developed by Askhat Sergazin allows checking the reliability of counteragents based on 40 legal and financial indicators just in three minutes. The projects, he noted, solves the needs of business persons and security services as well as prevents the risks of fraud and saves time.

Automating and gathering the data in one software is a significant pool factor attracting large companies in the quasi-public and banking sector, microcredit organisations, companies and consulting agency, small and medium enterprises and foreign companies as well.

One of the hardware projects participating in the incubator is the JayBox mobile projector computer, which is portable and can be managed by gestures.

Its mobility does not limit its functions. The computer is equipped with Windows OS, Intel Core processor, Full HD screen in a 10-100-inch range, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and a 3.5 mm jack for headphones. Target areas include medicine, education, business to business and smart house.

Ski resort to be built in Bayanaul tourist zone

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – Tourists delight in visiting picturesque and invigorating Bayanaul in the Pavlodar region, where a ski centre offering winter getaways will be constructed on Myrzashoky Mountain.

The government pays attention to the region, especially to developing tourism, said Bayanaul Deputy Akim (Mayor) Azilkhon Abuov.

"We didn't dream of building large complexes at the ski centre 20 years ago. Having the beautiful nature of Bayanaul, we should develop our tourism not only for our citizens, but for the whole world," he said.

At 800 metres, Myrzashoky Mountain is accessible only by cableway. The system, which will have 70 seats, will stretch more than a kilometre and carry up to 500 people a day, he added. The centre will offer skiing, snowboarding and sleigh rides on a ski trail to be cleared of grass and sharp stones to ensure safety.

The ski centre will provide training facilities, as experts have determined the mountain conforms to the level that appeals to professional athletes, said Bayanaul Akim (Mayor) Orzageldy Kairgeldinov at last year's press conference. The town's administration resumed air travel a year ago to attract tourists.

Ski team member Adil Talgatbek, 15, is anxiously waiting for the resort to open. Local junior students received a full set of equipment for freestyle and ski racing lessons and he dreams of becoming a great skier and snowboarder.

Sponsors are supporting the project under the Tugan Zher (Kazakh for "motherland") programme. The ski centre is a breath of fresh

air for residents of small Karazhar village located near the mountain and while it has not opened yet, they already have big plans. Schoolteacher and blogger Zura Zhusupbayeva, who noted the village is ready to welcome guests in all seasons, has started sewing sports caps and bandanas with the Myrzashoky Mountain logo.

In addition to the cableway and ski trail, Karazhar will offer a camping area and café. Vacation season in Myrzashoky will be year-round, where extreme sports lovers can hang glide and paraglide.

Bayanaul is also the place for those who enjoy swimming and hiking. The region's three main lakes – Sabyndykol, Toraigyr and Zhasybai – attract visitors in the summer. Zhasybai beach has a new pier, glowing fountain and sun lounge.

Local guides recommend visiting Bayanaul National Park located in the small village of the same name about 450 kilometres from the capital. It boasts beautiful lakes, forest-filled mountains and unique caves.

The name of each lake or pass, mountain or cliff is connected to legends based on real events and two versions exist about the origin of the name Bayanaul. One story claims the region was named in honour of Bayan-Sulu, the heroine of the popular epic poem "Kozy-Korpesh and Bayan-Sulu." According to another account, Bayanaul means prosperous hill, a place of rich and blessed grazing mountains.

Lake Zhasybai is associated with 18th century period when the Kazakh people struggled against the Dzungars. Zhasybai, a brave soldier, was killed by an arrow during an ambush and the people renamed Lake Shoinkul in his memory.



Photo credit: techpreneurs.kz

THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

BARYS ARENA

March 1 at 7.30 p.m. HC Barys – HC Avangard Omsk

ASTANA OPERA

March 1 at 7 p.m. Music Will Touch The Strings Of Your Soul, concert

March 2 at 7 p.m. La Bohème, opera

March 4 at 6 p.m. The Symphony of Spring, concert

March 8, 10 at 6 p.m. Swan Lake, ballet

March 9 at 7 p.m. Invitation to Dance, concert

ASTANA ARENA

March 4 at 3 p.m. FC Astana – FC Kairat, Kazakhstan Super Cup

SARYARKA VELOTREK

March 4 at 6 p.m. PBC Astana - BC Tsmoki-Minsk

ASTANA BALLET

March 8, 9 at 6 p.m. Awakening of Spring, ballet

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

One of 100 New Faces introduces new breast cancer diagnosis, treatment methods

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – Dana Bashibayeva, one of Kazakhstan's 100 New Faces, calls on women to put their health first and has introduced new methods of breast disease diagnosis and treatment.

A supporter of preventive healthcare, she uses the power of social media to raise awareness of women's health. She currently has about 50,000 followers on her Instagram account.

Bashibayeva started her career in the oncology department after graduating from a university in Almaty.

"At this time, I learned a lot about the breast diseases with silent conditions and a wide age range. I also knew that most women do not know the measures of prevention. They did not understand what kind of disease it was and what could have led to it. They do not pay attention to the first early signs of the disease and do not do the full check-up. There is a need to develop prevention measures to lower risks," she said.

She knew there was a shortage of breast physicians and specialists working with benign breast diseases. Treating the diseases can prevent breast cancer.

"I understood the necessity to develop this area. I had internships at the First Pavlov State Medical University of St. Petersburg, which is engaged in the prevention of breast cancer. I try to bring new trends and approaches. For example, I implemented the method of treating purulent mastitis, which occurs because of lactostasis (milk stagnation), without surgery. We have



Dana Bashibayeva

good results and, most importantly, our patients are satisfied," she said.

Bashibayeva focuses on the diagnosis to avoid surgical intervention because of "the emotional experiences of surgeons for women."

"I conduct all the stages of treatment, from the very first day to the post-operation period. I underwent retraining on radiation diagnostics. I can perform ultrasound, biopsy and surgery operations," she said.

Currently residing in the capital, Bashibayeva visits the South Kazakhstan region every two-three months for medical appointments.

"When I moved to Shymkent, I

started to promote myself through my Instagram account because nobody knew me there. As a result, my account became widely popular. On the first visit, I examined over 150 people in five days. I knew that people were in need of these consultations. I also do consultations in Almaty," she added.

Bashibayeva initiated a free breast cancer screening campaign entitled Pink October to coincide with Oct. 19, the world day of the fight against breast cancer.

"Last year, this campaign was held every Saturday. More than 50 people were examined. I organise

such initiative on International Women's Day, too," she said.

Breast cancer has ranked first among cancer diseases in the country for a long time. It is also third in terms of the mortality rate. More than 400 new cases of breast cancer are registered annually and seven out of 10 women have mastopathy.

Societal trends are one of the reasons why the disease is widespread. A growing number of women are involved in businesses and careers and delayed pregnancies and shortened lactation periods are common. Infrequent sex is also one of the factors causing mastopathy and breast cancer, a factor affected by the increase in the divorce rate.

"Women do not understand why I ask about their sexual activity and I have to explain that all these factors are connected. I always raise this issue on social media. At first, it was difficult to promote my account. Our people admire a beautiful and glamorous lifestyle. I proposed some famous bloggers free screening to promote a healthy lifestyle challenge. None responded. It is important to raise awareness in society and that is what I am doing daily," she noted.

Bashibayeva plans to implement a strategy to fight the disease at the state level because the issues are urgent.

"I became a participant of the 100 New Faces project thanks to my subscribers and patients who voted for me. I am very grateful to them. I was the first who raised this topic on social media. Now, I would like to organise a flash mob to raise breast cancer awareness," she said.

Red Cross and Red Crescent conference slated in Almaty

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – The Kazakh Red Crescent Society, which provides social and humanitarian assistance, first aid classes and training and prepping for natural disasters, will hold its European conference May 2-4 in Almaty. The event is an important one for the city, noted CEO Elena Kim.

"This year, the tenth anniversary of the European conference will be held here in Almaty. We will receive 52 national Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies in May," she said.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is also seeking support from the Kazakh Red Crescent to help other members of the worldwide humanitarian movement.

"At the last general assembly of ICRC, we presented the initiative to provide consultative assistance for Central Asia countries," she added.

"We are planning to change into a donor in 2020 with the help of IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies)."

The Kazakh Red Crescent was initially a recipient, receiving financial resources from foreign partners to provide humanitarian aid beginning in 1992. The emergency, tuberculosis and volunteer activity programmes were formed eight years later with ICRC assistance. When Kazakhstan became financially stable and took its position in the international arena, Red Crescent became partly self-financing. With the help of the Swiss Red Cross, it launched a fundraising strategy in 2014 to attract citizens wishing to help.

The organisation invests numerous resources in cooperation with the corporate sector. This year, it is planning to negotiate with 50 companies.

"The people in Kazakhstan actively participate in the events that we hold. Become a donor and win the iPhone 7 project works in Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, Karaganda and Aktoke cities. Also, we have charitable coupons for donation that can be exchanged for a product from our partners," said Kim.

With its main office in Almaty and 19 cross-country branches, Red Crescent establishes pro-



Elena Kim

grammes for each region based on their individual issues. Almaty region and Almaty and Shymkent cities struggle with earthquakes, while others need to develop blood donations or suffer from spring floods. With the support of Bulat Utemuratov Charitable Foundation, the organisation has raised funds to assist those who may be harmed by this year's post-snow-melt floods.

"The funds have already been transferred and will be set during an emergency," she said.

Red Crescent has 1,500 volunteers in Kazakhstan, but has problems recruiting permanent members.

"Before becoming a member of the Red Crescent, you need to understand what the organisation does. The main motive to come and stay is the credibility the Red Crescent achieves by transparency and comprehension," she added.

Red Crescent has cooperated with the Ministry for Religious and Civil Society Affairs and the Civil Initiatives Support Centre which regulate and deal with social grants, demonstrating its ability to use government services to prepare citizens for natural disasters or become involved in blood donation. The organisation is now concentrating on finding permanent donors to reduce costs and avoid risks.

A global humanitarian network, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has assisted those facing disaster, conflict, health and social problems since its creation in 1863. It consists of 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and its emblems serve as protective and distinctive signs.

Cardiac surgeons conduct artificial heart transplant

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – The specialists of the National Scientific Cardiac Surgery Centre conducted Kazakhstan's first artificial heart transplant Oct. 19, 2017 for a 60-year-old Pavlodar native, kazakh-tv.kz reports.

The innovative development of French bioengineers and the high professionalism of Kazakh doctors was a breakthrough in cardiac surgery. In general, approximately 20 similar surgeries are planned in the world within six months.

"This is not just the implantation of an artificial heart. It is about giving hope and an opportunity to patients who cannot receive the donor heart or who are no longer suitable for heart transplant. The artificial heart is very close to the normal physiological state of the body in its parameters," Chairman of Board of National Scientific Cardiac Surgical Centre Yuri Pya said.

Chief Physician of Paediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery Scientific and Practical Medical Centre in Kiev Vladimir Zhovnr

said such unique procedures show a high level of medicine in Kazakhstan.

"The fact that Kazakhstan has mastered this methodology, that our counterparts from Kazakhstan have the opportunity to implant artificial heart is a great achievement. I am happy for my Kazakh colleagues; they have the opportunity to do this. This is quite an expensive technology. I hope that Kazakhstan will not stop at this, but will develop further," he said.

Experts say medical tourism in

Kazakhstan also attracts some foreign patients, particularly from India, the Czech Republic, Italy, the U.S., the U.K. and China who rely on the experience of doctors conducting complex operations.

"I looked through the internet about necessary treatment and decided to choose Almaty, because local specialists have good experience in conducting similar surgeries. And, of course, the cost is affordable as well. The same operations in the U.S. or Korea will cost twice as much," said American tourist Farida Workman.

Entrepreneur inspires Kazakh teenagers

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – Askhat Abzhanov, an entrepreneur from Stepnogorsk, is the founder of Zhana Urpak ("new generation" in Kazakh) Leadership School in Almaty. The school conducts various trainings for teenagers, but its most important feature is the seven-day camping programme outside the city, where youngsters live without phones and laptops and literally awaken their motivation and build confidence.

"Our main idea is to help teenagers become more self-confident, to teach them how to work in teams and improve relations with parents. At the camp, they work with our trainers and instructors. Teens leave our camp with glowing eyes, self-confidence and with new friends," said Abzhanov in an interview with The Astana Times.

The average student age is 15, although the school welcomes everyone from 13-17. The camps are organised during school breaks. To date, approximately 700 people from 15 cities have experienced the Zhana Urpak programme, which has several modules. Newcomers usually begin with the awakening module; the second seven-day module involves participants setting goals and learning to reach them through different technologies.

Abzhanov noted his aim is to train 100,000 next generation leaders by 2030.

"Our mission is to enter the top 10 most developed countries of the world by educating leaders of the new generation. Physically we cannot work with all school students of Kazakhstan, but we understand that if we choose a certain audience and will prepare them for the future, they can be leaders and could lead the people around them. Then, we can say we have contributed to the development of our country," he said.

The two-year-old school has already been recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), receiving UNESCO club status.

The Zhana Urpak staff consists of 10 people under the age of 30. When training teenagers, Abzhanov and his team use the coaching method.

"Some methods say that it is necessary to resolve inner issues, while we talk more about opportunities; we say 'you are great, everything is okay.' We give confidence, look towards the future; we don't look back or to past issues," he said.

At the same time, it is very important to work with parents.

"We understand that most of the problems of the teenager come from issues with the parents

connected with their expectations and demands. The seven-day course also includes three trainings for parents where we work with them on their physiological sets, limiting beliefs. They start understanding their children," said Abzhanov.

After finishing the programme the school offers a community option, where teens can participate in all events, including sports activities, philosophy and cinema nights, for free.

"They communicate, share experiences. As they say, the environment is 50 percent of the success. So we create such a format, so they can be with successful people," he added.

Abzhanov was engaged in different businesses, including IT companies, procurement, an advertising agency and car wash, from an early age. The enterprises were not inspiring, as "there was not a needed groove," he said.

"I was not ready to dedicate my life to those businesses. Then I asked myself – what would I like to do my whole life? I understood that I found my mission in working with youth, in educating a new generation of confident and energetic leaders," he added.

The initial step was visiting schools, conducting free master classes and trainings and writing about them on social media. The



Askhat Abzhanov

schools, mainly public, were his first challenge.

"We faced the fact that the managements of schools feared something new, were afraid of letting people in. There was some kind of barrier. It was easier for them to refuse than to allow and take responsibility," he said.

Rather than address schools, Zhana Urpak started with parents by conducting master classes in an office and putting advertisements on Facebook and Instagram.

"The second main challenge

was the fact the parents were not ready to accept that they are responsible for the future of their kids, that they influenced and caused the self-doubt and insularity of their children. We always say that to educate your child, you have to educate yourself first. You have to be an example for your children," said Abzhanov.

"At the same time, we managed to put the idea right and now we have a great connection with parents. We are on the same team with them," he added.

He feels parents should inspire,

help and support their children, criticise less, praise more, control less, trust more and give more responsibility.

As for future plans, Zhana Urpak expects to open divisions this year in the capital and Aktau.

"Also, we will definitely launch a Kazakh language programme. A lot of Kazakh-speaking teens and parents come to us, but our programme is built in Russian," he said.

Abzhanov also wants to launch a project focused on teenagers living in villages, as no such options currently exist in rural areas.

"We have picked Mangistau region and we would like to go there with the team and conduct trainings in all villages of the region for free. We want to select leaders with potential and bring them to Almaty during the summer to our seven-day programme, to give them confidence and a boost. After they come back to the village they can continue this development, to help their classmates and schoolmates. Hopefully, it can attract sponsors; we hope businesspeople will support our project. We already have those who are willing to finance flights or accommodations," he said.

"We have visited Kuryk village in the Mangistau region, where we saw those glowing eyes, hungry for knowledge, motivation and training programmes," he added.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Kazakh singer named most popular singer of the year in China



Dimash Kudaibergen

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – Kazakh singer Dimash Kudaibergen is gaining popularity worldwide and was named Most Popular Singer of the Year for the second year in a row at the Feb. 9 Top Global Chinese Music Awards.

"I love you very much, thank you for your love," Kudaibergen wrote on his page in Instagram.

He was also named Most Popular Foreign Singer at the Asian Music GaLa, received accolades at the MTV music awards and, at the end of last year, was awarded Best Artist at the Global Golden Chart Awards in Beijing.

Meanwhile, fans of Kudaibergen in France are awaiting his performance at the spring International Francophonie Day, said counsellor for cultural and cooperation affairs at the French Embassy in Kazakhstan Guillaume Kasperski.

"We know that Kudaibergen performs songs in the French language. The French Embassy is working with him. Dimash is the

pride of Kazakhstan, he is known and loved in France. Kudaibergen fan club members dream to meet with him. As planned, Kudaibergen will take part in the celebration of the holiday, and, perhaps, he will perform the songs in French," he said.

The Kazakh singer is currently on tour in China and has signed a one-and-a-half-year contract with Chinese agency BG Talent to participate in the world tour, inform. kz reports.

Aktobe-born and raised, Kudaibergen was the winner of the Grand Prix of the Slavic Bazaar 2015 competition in Vitebsk (Belarus) and the People's Favourite National Prize in Kazakhstan. He was awarded the Certificate of Honour of the Kazakh President for helping to unify the people of Kazakhstan. In March last year, the Kazakh star won the top award at the China Top Music Awards in the category Best Asian Popular Singer for his outstanding performances in the television show "Singer 2017."

Young dombra player among those who inspire nation

By Dana Omirgazy

ASTANA – Nineteen-year-old dombra player Alexey Lodochnikov has been named one of Kazakhstan's 100 New Faces. An ethnic Russian, the gifted educator at Kachirsky children's home in the Pavlodar region speaks fluent Kazakh and sings Kazakh folk songs.

"In April of last year, I learned about the 100 New Faces project at the session of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. I did not seriously think about it. In the summer, the project organisers called me and suggested I participate in the project from the Pavlodar region. Of course, I agreed with great pleasure and waited for the vote to begin. The number of votes I got impressed me. I am thankful to all those who voted for me," he told The Astana Times.

Lodochnikov has performed with many famous Kazakh singers. In 2016, he played with Dimash Kudaibergen at a concert dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the nation's independence and later with Farrukh Zokirov, an Uzbek and Soviet singer and member of Yalla folk rock band, at the assembly's 25th session.

"I have played dombra since I was five years old. Then, I watched TV frequently and one day I saw a musical instrument. I became curious about it and asked my educa-



Alexey Lodochnikov

tors to let me attend dombra classes. Gradually, I began to sing," he said.

Lodochnikov fondly remembers his first teacher, Askar Erkebulanov, who taught music theory. While a student, he received dombra lessons from Medygat Manapov and currently studies in the "Folk singing with dombra" department at the College of Music for gifted children in Pavlodar.

"Now, I am a third-year student. My teacher is Amangeldy Kozhanov. I have many plans for the future. First, I want to graduate from college and enter the higher

education institution. I also write my own songs and in the summer I plan to give solo concerts in the Pavlodar region," he said.

Lodochnikov had an opportunity to perform before President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2014 and the next year was invited to play in the Presidential Orchestra concert in his native city.

"The Presidential Orchestra was in the Pavlodar region on a tour. Then, I was offered a chance to play and sing with the orchestra. Many people were surprised to see a Russian boy playing dombra and singing Kazakh songs," he noted.

Kazakh Honoured Art Worker and composer Olzhas Suleimenov shared his impressions at the time of the young man's talent.

"I am very impressed. It is amazing. I wish him only prosperity. Alexey, do not stop and go ahead. I wish for him to perform on the big stage!" he said, wrote khabar.kz.

The events motivated Lodochnikov to new heights, as he subsequently won regional and national music competitions. He now leads the Zhas Otan youth wing at his college and is studying hard to make his dreams come true.

Denis Ten participates in Olympic Channel documentary

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – Kazakh Figure skater Denis Ten, the bronze medallist at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, was the first athlete shot for the Game Breakers documentary series produced by the Olympic Channel. The film demonstrates the difficulties he faced at the Games and how his victory affected Kazakhstan's figure skating culture.

"There is no perfect success story. Ups and downs, injuries, bad and good impressions – it's a collection of everything. Nobody knows how many hours you have spent training. Nobody knows what is behind the curtain. On the ice, we are all equal. When you succeed, it's a great reward for the work you have done in the past," said Ten as part of the 10-minute documentary.

He also confessed he was in a car accident just two weeks before

the 2014 Games and overcame a tough period under the pressure.

"Everyone wanted me to win for my country. When I was on the podium at the Olympic Games, I realised that the whole country cheered me on. When I returned to Kazakhstan, it was such fantastic attention. I could see the birth of the figure skating culture," he said.

Speaking at the 128th International Olympic Committee (IOC) session, Ten noted his story is a real example of what Kazakhstan

can achieve in winter sports. His speech, shown in the movie, indicated he was standing for thousands of young Kazakh athletes envisioning their own Olympic dreams.

Ten was the first Kazakh figure skater to gain medals and recognition at the World Championships, Four Continents Championships, Asian Winter Games and Olympic Games. The Olympic Channel titled the production "How Denis Ten put Kazakhstan on the map with an unlikely winter sport."

According to Ten's Instagram page, he has dealt with ankle, back and hip injuries in the past two seasons. He gained 70.12 points at this year's Games, taking 27th position. Although he did not advance to the free skating programme, he wrote on his social media page that his participation was an achievement. PyeongChang was his third Olympic appearance, as he debuted at the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver.

South Korea's KBS channel produced "Underneath the Ice," its own 50-minute documentary about the Kazakh figure skater. The film, released Feb. 6, tells the story of Ten's career and family, as his great-great-grandfather is on the list of the 12 most outstanding fighters for South Korean independence.

Born in Almaty, Ten, 25, started his skating path when he was five years old and won his first competition in 2003. He was trained by skating coach Tatiana Tarasova.

Other Kazakh skaters are following Ten's success. Elizabet Tursynbayeva, the nation's 2016 Winter Youth Olympic bronze medallist, will compete Feb. 21 in the Games' ladies single skating short programme.

The IOC launched the Olympic Channel in August 2016 to generate interest in the Olympic movement.

Competitive cheerleading gaining recognition abroad

Continued from Page B1

Mammadov said about 3,500 Kazakhs are involved in cheerleading, with 90 percent of those female. That ratio reflects cheerleading generally around the world. Boys join cheerleading classes after watching practices and realising that cheerleading is not just a dance, it needs physical strength, he added.

"Traditionally, cheerleading includes pyramids, tumbling and dance as well as shouting cheers to support hockey or basketball players," explained Mammadov. "However, Kazakh teams do their best in dance performances rather than in traditional styles, as hip-hop culture is developed in the country. They also have good results in ... performances with pompoms, and mixed performances with sportsmen."

Kazakhstan's Union of Cheerleading takes on the role of mediator and adviser, organising championships and master classes in 13 regions of the country. The federation demands coaches follow the federation's rules and standards of cheerleading. While athletes prepare their shows individually, showcasing their strengths, there are mandatory elements: the appearance of the girls, the presence of pom-



Ruslan Mammadov (C) and the team at the World Championship 2016, Orlando.

poms, costumes, acrobatic elements, and support and position rebuilding.

According to the KUC president, teams chosen as participants in championships demonstrated Kazakh culture, inserting national ornaments on costumes and performing to music with elements of Kazakhstan's traditional string instrument, the dombra, and Kazakh songs. ICU judges found this exotic and fresh, especially in recent performances in Japan.

Mammadov thinks cheerleading is good for complex education especially at school because it has elements of acrobatics, gymnastics and sports dance, and teaches emotional management. When the match of the century takes place, the cheerleading team upholds and motivates sportsmen as well as entertains spectators, engaging them to express support. And despite not having a long history in the country, cheerleading is developing.

Experienced coach and judge Olga Kurakina, Mammadov says, is the first voice of cheerleading in Kazakhstan. Her followers who study abroad teach in the U.S. and others from Eurasian and Nazarbayev Universities recommended themselves as good trainers.

"The U.S. Embassy pays attention to cheerleading development in Ka-

zakhstan. They enjoyed our presentation at the embassy and even came to watch the practice. Our athletes easily can get visas to the United States when there are championships," he said, confirming the participation of Kazakhstan in the 2018 ICU World Championship in Florida.

This year, KUC also intends to defend its leading position, preparing a performance for World University Cheerleading competition in October in Poland.

The federation generally invites coaches from Russia, because there is no language barrier to overcome with them. However, this year the ICU is going to send foreign trainers to explain how to judge and what it is important to practice. Kazakh trainers in turn conduct master classes for cheerleaders from Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan's Federation Union of Cheerleading and Cheer Sport demonstrated to the National Olympic Committee of Kazakhstan that cheerleading should be considered a sport in the country and finally got recognition certificates of a new sample last year.

The International Cheerleading Union was established in 2004 and accepted by the International Olympic Committee. It unites 105 national cheerleading federations spreading cheerleading throughout the world.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Precision agriculture technology, digitisation introduced to boost productivity

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – The Kazakh Ministry of Agriculture has presented plans to focus this year on introducing precision technology and intensive irrigation, livestock development and renewing agricultural machinery. The four key areas are expected to increase labour productivity in the agro-industrial sector.

To increase technical equipment, 5.5 billion tenge (US\$17 million) will be allocated to subsidise the agricultural leasing interest rate and raise the investment subsidy by 20 billion tenge (US\$62 million) by reducing inefficient subsidies.

“We plan to introduce electronic field mapping, accurate weather data and wireless sensors, space monitoring and other solutions to validate precision agricultural practices. We will

develop an economic model for introducing precision technologies for different types of farms and an entirely new system of subsidy. We will launch pilot projects in certain farms in cooperation with local executive bodies. The educational institutions, research institutes and the world’s leading companies that are engaged in agriculture digitisation and development of technologies will assist in training farmers,” said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture Umirzak Shukeiyev during the Feb. 13 governmental meeting.

The approach to cooperatives will also be revised to increase meat export. The action is expected to encourage cooperation of small and medium-sized businesses with large feedlot sites to ensure marketing, technology distribution, knowledge and access to financing.

“We expect to ensure the investments in technology up to 240 billion tenge (US\$742 million) by 2021 with a gradual increase of support measures. The renewal of agricultural machinery will reach approximately 6 percent in three years; now, it stands at 2 percent,” he added.

Measures will also be taken to rehabilitate irrigation. Water supply will be restored this year to 65,000 hectares.

The agricultural producers and processing enterprises will join as meat cooperatives to solve the issues concerning processing agricultural products. Agricultural science aims to focus mainly on introducing new technologies rather than inventing livestock breeds.

“There are three universities and 23 research institutes at the ministry. This number will be reduced to 12 due to consolidation. Agricultural universities will be-

come research institutions with research institutes and farms,” said Shukeiyev.

An effective system ensuring epizootic, veterinary and sanitary well-being will be developed to increase the efficiency of state control and supervision. Veterinary border control will be established and unified approaches developed in cooperation with Russian and Kyrgyz veterinary services to combat transboundary animal diseases, monitor quality control of vaccines at the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) laboratories and implement against nodular dermatitis and foot and mouth disease.

January’s agriculture, forestry and fishery gross output was 113.4 billion tenge (US\$350 million), a 3.7-percent increase compared to the corresponding month in 2017, reported the committee on statistics.

Phased plan to transfer Kazakh alphabet to Latin script

By Frol Leandroer

ASTANA – A draft action plan has been developed detailing the phased transfer of the Kazakh alphabet to Latin script by 2025. Sacral Geography of Kazakhstan, a special project within the Ruhani Janghyru (Modernisation of Kazakhstan) programme, is also being implemented.

Vice Minister of Culture and Sports Yerlan Kozhagapanov reported on the progress to execute President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s decree “On the transition of the Kazakh alphabet from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin script.” A national commission was established to complete the project in the next seven years.

The first phase covers 2018-2020, when preparatory work and measures will be completed to improve the regulatory legal framework. Spelling rules will be devel-



Yerlan Kozhagapanov

duced with Latin graphics. A step-by-step office work transfer will also be completed in educational organisations.

The ministry is currently working to establish Til-Kazyna, a translation coordination centre.

Sacral Geography of Kazakhstan includes the Kassiyetti Kazakhstan centre at the National Museum. A list of sacred places, with 183 objects of national significance and 520 of local significance, was compiled in the last 10 months. The first volume of the Sacred Kazakhstan encyclopaedia was published and an interactive virtual map with detailed descriptions and 3D tours was prepared for each object. Together with the BBC, four documentary films have been completed for broadcast on the Discovery, National Geographic and Viasat History channels, the official said.

“Our next main task is to popularise Kazakhstan in the eyes of the world community and to develop the infrastructure of domestic and inbound tourism. For the first time, the tourism sector was included among the drivers of the national economy, into the so-called Olympic modernisation route 4.0,” said Kozhagapanov.

The ministry has set the ambitious task of increasing the tourism share of the GDP from the current 1 percent to 8 percent by 2025.

Abai Arena multifunctional complex construction starts in Semey

Staff Report

ASTANA – Construction has started on Abai Arena, a complex with an entertainment and sports centre in the new district in Semey. The facility is dedicated to the city’s 300th anniversary.

“Abai Arena will set the trend for the development of culture and sports in the city with its unique architectural design and functionality. It will be possible to organise various events in huge halls and use the swimming pools for both sports and recreation. Construction will take place in the

Karagaily microdistrict as a paragon of various forms of modern architecture,” said East Kazakhstan region Akim (Governor) Danial Akhmetov.

The three-storey complex will have a sports hall for 5,000 people, five swimming pools, 19 rooms for various sports activities, a gym, computer club, cinema hall seating 30 and two cafés. Sports competitions, swimming lessons, water aerobics and water polo will also be held in the facility.

The complex will measure approximately 14,000 square metres. The exterior will include aluminium panels and a media façade.

Abai Arena will be located on the bank of the Ertis (Irtysh) River near the pine forest.

“This will be a beautiful microdistrict. We need to construct apartment buildings of about 12 floors around the complex. The façade should be of bright colours so that people will be pleased with the microdistrict and the city as a whole,” said Akhmetov.

Two Semey construction companies have been commissioned for the first nine-storey residential buildings, according to the regional press service. The brick cladding and window installation have been

completed and the internal finishing works are underway.

A kindergarten for 320 children, built under a public-private partnership, will be commissioned later this year.

Karagaily microdistrict will also include 98 apartment blocks, a school for 1,200 pupils, 720-student intellectual school, two additional kindergartens and hospitals. Wide roads, pedestrian areas and parking lots will be built for the convenience of residents. During construction, facilities for workers, including hostels for 200 people and canteens providing four meals a day, will also be erected.

Venerable confectionery aims to edge out imports with local sweets

By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – Bayan Sulu, a Kazakh confectionery based in Kostanai, produces 31 percent of local sweets and is launching new products to replace imports and boost exports.

Since its establishment in 1974, Bayan Sulu has prioritised stability and taken a systemic approach to business development. This principle allowed it to survive the harsh 1990s and earn a third of the domestic sweets market share, producing more than 300 types of sweets and approximately 50,000 tonnes of cookies, candies and waffles per year.

Now, the company aspires to replace imported sweets with its products.

Production of chocolate bars similar to the world-famous Mars, Snickers and Milky Way was launched in December, as was a line of glazed cookies resembling Twix. The cost of the project, capable of producing 5,600 tonnes per year, is 1.5 billion tenge (US\$4.47 million), of which 1.2 billion tenge (US\$3.73 million) came through a Sberbank loan. A government subsidy through the Business Road Map 2020 programme provides for 10 percent of the interest on the loan, leaving Bayan Sulu to pay 3 percent interest.

“We currently primarily aim to replace imported products with local goods; however, we also seek to boost exports. Fortunately, this is made possible with the state support of export-oriented manufacturing

entities, in particular Kazakh Export and Kazakh Invest,” said Bayan Sulu President Timur Sadykov.

The confectionery buys input products such as flour, sugar and packaging, domestically. However, since cacao beans are imported, there is a dependent relationship between product prices and imported ingredients.

Currently, about 35 to 45 percent of total production volume is exported to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, China and Russia, importing almost 90 percent of all Bayan Sulu exports, according to Forbes.kz.

“Most factories employ the same machinery and the same ingredients, thus the only opportunity to lower costs is to change the recipe; in other

words, to substitute expensive ingredients with cheaper ones. However, we refuse to do that, and have to compete with unscrupulous producers who use flavours instead of milk and vegetable fats instead of chocolate,” said Sadykov.

Despite the presence of major local confectioneries like Rakhmat, Bayan Sulu and Ulker, half of Kazakhstan’s sweets are imported from Russia, Ukraine and Turkey.

“We view local producers as partners rather than rivals, since they also play an important role in the domestic food industry. Therefore, our only common rival is import,” noted Sadykov.

Bayan Sulu acquired equipment for waffle products with the help of DBK-Leasing, a subsidiary of the Development Bank of Kazakhstan, in an attempt to increase its product range. Five production lines with the capacity of 700 kilograms per hour cost the factory 1.85 million euros, out of which DBK-Leasing provided 1.275 million euros for nine years.

Most counterfeit products sold in Kazakhstan advertised via internet

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – The Kazakh state revenue committee investigation department has determined the largest supply channel of counterfeit products is the internet, reported expert officer Elmira Kalygulova at roundtable on combating counterfeit product distribution issues.

“We discovered illegal issues that infringe upon trademarks in the course of operational-search measures. There are counterfeit tobacco products, soccer balls, alcohol products and household chemical goods. Motor oil, drink, sport shoe and mobile phone manufacturing was suppressed as well,” she said.

She added most of infringements are related to DVD-ROMs, both in distributing counterfeit games for Sony PlayStation and 1C consoles and computer programmes for accountants. The committee found nine underground facilities that manufacture discs.

Counterfeit products that do not meet the standards of safety and quality enter the market via the internet. Falsified food products, medical items and construction materials can influence people’s lives and safety.

Kalygulova noted 39 pre-trial proceedings regarding illegal trademark use were registered last year, most by representatives of legitimate suppliers, and 19 criminal cases were registered as a result of operational-search activities.

Investigation teams work to identify the import schemes for falsified products and check express freight delivery.

After the meeting, Ministry of Justice intellectual property rights department deputy director Beket Aligozhin reported 208 inspections were conducted, 168 administrative offense protocols prepared and 157 lawbreakers required to respond.

“The right holders determine the damage. We have already confiscated counterfeit products for more than 16 million tenge (US\$50,158),” he said. “As you know, falsified products come from China, our main supplier. Therefore, we take measures not only in the state, but also abroad. Customs

authorities shut down product realisation and limit offenders entering the market.”

The process involves the legitimate trademark owner initiating a civil case in court or applying to law enforcement, he added.

Kazakh legislation on trademarks, service marks and appellations of origin claims that goods, labels and packaging with illegally used trademarks are considered counterfeit products. Accommodating, storage, importing, services and internet use are also a violation of the trademark right.

The main victims of counterfeit product realisation are world-famous companies, as they lose not only profit, but their brands’ reputation for producing high-quality products.

The ministry is currently working to establish Til-Kazyna, a translation coordination centre.

oped for the new Kazakh alphabet and text-based IT programmes re-coded into the Latin alphabet.

During the second phase, from 2021-2023, passports, citizens’ identity cards and other documents in the state language will be issued in Latin script. Seminars, lectures and courses with philologists and linguists will be organised to train teachers and the adult population.

The final phase in 2024-2025 will involve a phased-in transfer for office work in local and central state bodies and state media, and printed publications will be pro-

SEZs do not justify state support, need to be improved

By Inga Seleznyova

ASTANA – The Ministry for Investment and Development recently determined that special economic zones are not justifying the state support they receive and has called for increased efficiency within the zones.

“We carried out a major analysis of the work of the special economic zones. There are certain omissions, shortcomings. A lot of money was invested in the infrastructure of the zones. We believe that to date 11 zones that are created due to public investments do not give the result that we expected. We conclude this analysis with the instruction of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and we will make concrete proposals for further work with each of these zones,” said Minister for Investment and Development Zhenis Kassymbek during the expanded meeting of the board of the ministry.

“The government will consider each free economic zone, their

work will be adjusted, following the results of two weeks work and we will be able to give proper information to the public,” the minister said.

In total, the minister said, since the creation of the special economic zones, 165 projects worth more than 800 billion tenge (US\$2.48 billion) have been launched, in addition, more than 13,000 jobs have been created.

“This year it is planned to launch 45 projects worth 171.7 billion tenge (US\$532.2 million) with the creation of more than 3,000 new jobs. In the areas of 115 projects worth 100 billion tenge (US\$310 million) have been launched, about 8,000 new jobs were created. This year we also plan to launch information systems for monitoring the activities of the zones, which will allow monitoring their effectiveness. In general, the main task in this direction is the approval of the draft law on the special economic zones and the implementation of the national investment strategy,” Kassymbek said.



SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Labour and Social Protection Ministry to focus on self-employed workforce, digitisation

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – The Kazakh Ministry of Labour and Social Protection will focus on formalising the self-employed workforce and continue digital transformation in the field in 2018, according to newly-appointed Minister Madina Abylkassymova.

The issue of the self-employed population, which currently accounts for nearly one-quarter of the nation's workforce, was raised during a Feb. 9 extended government meeting. President Nursultan Nazarbayev criticised the ministry's performance in this area and noted failure to address the self-employed population that does not

pay taxes delayed introduction of a mandatory social medical insurance system initially scheduled for last July.

He instructed the government to address the issue and the same day signed a decree appointing Abylkassymova, then Vice Minister of National Economy, as the new Labour and Social Protection Minister. She replaced Tamara Duissenova.

Current legislation is not equipped for self- and atypical forms employment. Abylkassymova reported the ministry will prepare a draft bill formalising the self-employed and informally employed (workers not paying pension contribution or unregistered businesses) population. The

project will envision mandatory simplified registration of the self-employed workforce, among other aspects.

"We will develop tax stimulating measures to move the self-employed from the shadows and simplify tax administration. The term 'self-employed population' will be defined in all laws and normative and legal acts in accordance with best international practices," she said.

The informally-employed population needs to be engaged in the nation's economy and its mandatory social medical insurance system, she noted, and the ministry will present a road map including measures meant to help achieve the objective.

Abylkassymova said the self-employed population will be trained and encouraged to engage in productive employment.

Another priority of the ministry's work is developing skills necessary for a new digital economy and creating quality jobs.

"Professional standards and relevant educational programmes will be renovated to increase the competitiveness of labour resources and their productivity. A national qualification system will be set up which will lay out the new approaches necessary for a digital economy. We will update the list of qualifications needed for the new economy as part of the fourth industrial revolution, as well as

improving the quality of education," she said.

Digitally transforming the economy entails jobs offset in different sectors. The measures regulating labour flow between the economic sectors will therefore be developed with companies, she added.

The ministry will continue working on productive employment and a mass entrepreneurship development programme.

"This year, 87 billion tenge (US\$268.83 million) is allocated to the programme with a scope of 571,000 people," said Abylkassymova.

The plan also includes measures to attract foreigners to work in key industries and economy sectors.

This year, the focus is also on

digitising the social and labour sectors.

"Electronic labour exchange was launched Jan. 1 and more than 200 employment centres, including private employment centres and online platforms, have joined the system. We are planning to double the number of people employed within this electronic labour exchange," she said.

Other digital solutions planned by the ministry include a pilot e-HR system envisioning electronic employment contracts, an employment record book and an electronic social services system, which will enable a "proactive approach to providing social services and improve their quality," she added.

North Kazakhstan region to welcome 767 families from south

By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – More than 3,400 people, or 767 families of migrants and "oralmen" (ethnic Kazakhs who have immigrated back to Kazakhstan since its independence), will move to the North Kazakhstan region this year in a government attempt to tackle the labour shortage problem.

"In order to relocate people from excess labour supply areas to those with labour shortages, we have created a road map and identified 224 settlements, including 116 settlements showing considerable potential of economic growth, 118 of moderate potential and seven district centres. There are 828 housing facilities and 1,282 vacancies available," said North Kazakhstan region employment coordination and social programme department head Sergey Yakovenko.

To ensure all the migrants are provided with jobs, employers will receive a one million tenge (US\$3,100) subsidy from the gov-

ernment this year for employing one family. The funding will serve to motivate employers to sign a social contract with employment centres and migrants.

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Nearly 60 families will also be given a five million tenge (US\$15,500) bank credit to start a business.

The migrants include 77 oralman families (385 people), as the number of migrants moving to the region this year has increased five-fold compared to 2017.

Last year 188 families (847 people) from Almaty, Kyzylorda, Mangystau, South Kazakhstan and Zhambyl regions moved to the north. The region welcomed more migrants than East Kazakhstan, Kostanai and Pavlodar regions, which attracted 128, 69 and 30 families respectively.

Yakovenko noted 363 individuals are of working age and 167 were employed. Approximately 430 children attend kindergarten and school. All families were provided with necessary support related to employment, housing and subsidies.

"As a result of these measures, migration loss has fallen for the first time in several years. In 2017 the net migration loss was 5,537 people,

which is less than the 7,221 people in the corresponding period of 2016," he added.

Regional governor Kumar Aksakalov emphasised the need to carefully select migrants by considering whether they are ready to engage in gardening and agriculture.

"Few migrants who have moved recently work on vegetable growing. We have plenty of land and water resources and, above all, attract people to grow crops and vegetables. Therefore, the migrants should be obliged to take training and only then move here," he said.

2,800 HIV-positive cases last year, prevalence remains low, says health official

Staff Report

ASTANA – Last year, more than 2,800 new HIV cases were detected in Kazakhstan, though the prevalence of HIV in the country remains low, said Vice Minister of Healthcare of Kazakhstan Lyazat Aktayeva at a recent technical seminar on HIV and migration in Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

"Over the past year, there have been about 3 million HIV tests among groups in the country of the population that are both voluntary and mandatory testing. A total 14 percent of the population was tested last year, and more than 2,800 new HIV cases were detected. Also last year more than 60,000 foreigners were examined, and 0.2 percent are positive. If you look at socially vulnerable groups among foreigners, the frequency is 9 percent," said Aktayeva, adding that the number of HIV cases in Kazakhstan grows about 10 percent annually.

She also said HIV prevention programmes are in place in Kazakhstan.

"Thirty-nine friendly clinics

and 144 syringe outlets operate in the regions financed from local budgets. Anonymous counselling is provided. And antiretroviral therapy for HIV-infected people is provided at the expense of the national budget," she added.

Today, 29,980 people are registered in the Kazakh regional and city centres of AIDS and in dispensary records.

Every year in Kazakhstan, about 150-200 HIV-positive foreigners are identified, said General Director of Centre for AIDS Prevention and Control Bauyrzhan Baiserkina at the same event.

"To date, in the process of identifying new HIV cases, we have about six percent of the contribution of foreign citizens to the statistics of the spread of HIV infection in Kazakhstan. This figure determines that HIV transmission can spread through migration processes. This year we started the project with the support of the Global Fund. About 150-200 people are diagnosed annually in Kazakhstan among the migrants. This year, 150 people are to be taken on treatment and laboratory support, and new strategies will be developed for working with this category of the population. This issue

is very relevant for Kazakhstan," said Baiserkina.

He also noted that these are general trends that are typical for the entire post-Soviet space. The issues of globalisation concern not only integration and interaction in the field of trade and economic relations, but also migration issues. In this part, migration processes, which are increasing in the global world, are also related to the spread of HIV infection, which acquires new features.

"Unfortunately, in the former Soviet Union countries there is no single document regulating the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HIV-infected people; their legal status and the possibility of obtaining minimum medical services are undetermined... In this connection, I would like to note that we are testing about 61,000 migrants who enter Kazakhstan, which is a very substantial load for the budget, healthcare expenses, and in order for these expenses to be effective, we need to determine in technical terms how these people will receive treatment, their registration in the dispensary records, and how they will live on the territory of the stay," said Baiserkina.

Two new eco-friendly trams added to 'tram capital of Kazakhstan'



By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – Pavlodar Tram Management recently put into operation in Pavlodar the first two of 23 eco-friendly, climate-equipped trams as part of Pavlodar's ongoing Public Transport Development Strategy.

Trams have been an indispensable part of Pavlodar, which was often referred to as the tram capital of Kazakhstan, since 1965. Such an eco-friendly way of transport is particularly important for a heavily industrialised city. Over time,

the length of tramways has increased from 11 to 90 kilometres and now approximately 100 trams carry 45,000 passengers on nine routes every day from 5 a.m. till midnight.

However, 90 percent of the trams are old and need to be replaced. The new trams meet current ecological, safety and energy consumption standards.

"The new trams will satisfy all requirements; they will be equipped with powerful heating systems suitable for our climate and the engines will consume 30-40 percent less energy than those

made in 1980s," said Pavlodar Tram Management Chairman Aituar Zhagazin.

The 23 new trams were purchased with a 13-year, \$7.68 million loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and a \$2.84 million from the national government.

"Trams will be delivered as soon as they are manufactured one by one. Up to date, three trams have been delivered from Minsk; two were launched last year and one will start working soon. The manufacturer Belkommunmash asks to extend the deadline for delivery, however, still promises to fulfil its commitment," added Zhagazin.

The Public Transport Development Strategy project was also launched by EBRD to improve public transport services. Dornier Consulting International GmbH with the Pavlodar city administration, regional government and other parties established the mission and objectives of the project and conducted a thorough analysis of the system. There are plans to develop a financial model and detailed plan to deliver the strategy.

Report summarises civil service reform results, defines improvement priorities

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – The Kazakh government has approved a report describing the stages of development of the civil service in the country, analysing the current state of the system, and offering assessments from international experts and proposals for further improvement in the sphere.

The stages of civil service development through the implementation of Kazakhstan's strategic programmes is discussed in the first section of the "National Report on Civil Service," presented by Civil Service and Anti-Corruption Affairs Agency deputy chair Aigul Shaimova at a Feb. 20 meeting.

"Three reforms were carried out in this sphere during the years of Kazakhstan's independence. They all were directly related to the processes of state transformation and the formation of the public administration system. The institutionalisation of this direction started when President [Nursultan Nazarbayev] signed the decree 'On the civil service,'" she said.

A unique model based on the principles of meritocracy, efficiency and accountability to society was created as a result of consistent reforms.

"Our country rose to 65 positions in the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) in terms of government effectiveness during 20 years," Shaimova said.

The second section of the report contains an analysis of the civil service for the entire period of independence.

According to the review, Kazakhstan's civil service meets international standards. The country avoided gender imbalances and issues related to an aging state apparatus.

A unified framework of competences was introduced in contrast to a number of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. It was successfully tested at the competency assessment of the B Corps employees.

Now 92 percent of civil servants have higher education diplomas and the stability of the state ap-

paratus is ensured. Today, the average age of a civil servant is 39. This corresponds to the current OECD index, in which aging is clearly visible. In Kazakhstan, 55 percent of civil servants are women, a figure that stands at 50 percent in Belgium, Italy and Spain.

The work on the further motivation of civil servants is underway.

"This year a new system of labour remuneration was launched. The pilot project is being implemented in four state bodies. The With the Diploma to the Village Project for employees working in rural areas will be continued to increase the attractiveness of the civil service in the regions. Social benefits for the purchase and construction of housing will be provided for them," she said.

The report's concluding chapter outlines prospects for further developing the civil service, including identifying ways to help create professional employees in the state apparatus, as well as tasks designed to help Kazakhstan achieve its goal of being one of the world's 30 most developed countries.

NATION&CAPITAL

TOURISM

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Mangistau eagle hunters to open falconry school

By Zhazira Dyussebekova

ASTANA – Mangistau region's berkutchi, or eagle hunters, plan to open their own falconry school in Tushybek village in an effort to preserve the ancient tradition, reported Kazakh TV.

"I want to promote the art of hunting with birds among young people. Five-six people are training now to become berkutchi (eagle hunters). We take part in competitions. We are planning to hunt with tourists. In the near future, we want to open a school," said organiser and berkutchi Mereke Otegali.

Six years ago, Otegali mastered hunting with a bird of prey and taught the art to approximately 10 of his fellow villagers. He hopes to share his experience with others and contribute to preserving the national tradition. His eagle, 2-year-old Aksengir, can hunt not only for foxes, but also young wolves.



Domesticating and training the predator birds requires certain skills and great patience.

"It is not easy to become an eagle

hunter. The chick must get used to the person and then he can be tamed and trained. The process is quite long and painstaking," he said.

The village is close to the highest point of the Karatau-Otpan mountain range. The entire steppe is visible, an im-

portant feature for hunters, he noted.

In times of famine, one golden eagle could feed a whole village.

They caught not only foxes, but rabbits and saiga antelopes.

"In old times, traditionally musicians were engaged in hunting. After performing the hunter's song and playing the kui, the berkutchi headed to hunt. This was considered to be a good sign. We want to revive this ancient tradition," said local historian and Otpan Historical and Cultural Complex representative Kuralai Izimbergenova.

While the country had only a few masters of the ancient art half a century ago, according to some data the number has increased to 100. Eagle hunting is becoming more popular not only in Kazakhstan, but also abroad. Eagle hunters, sometimes called kusbegi, want to preserve the customs of their ancestors by holding annual Kansanor competitions.

School organisers also plan to conduct excursions for tourists, who will have the opportunity to take part in hunting, as well as learn about its history.

Ust-Kamenogorsk – major industrial and tourism centre

By Assel Satubaldina

ASTANA – Ust-Kamenogorsk, a city in eastern Kazakhstan with a population of more than 300,000, is a must visit destination for someone starting his or her journey through the country. It offers both historic insight and a pleasant vacation near the beautiful Rudny Altai Mountains, canyons and beaches.

Located where the Ulba and Irtysh rivers merge, Ust-Kamenogorsk was founded in 1720 as a fort linking the then-Russian empire to Asia and decades later became an important trade centre connecting the empire to Mongolia and China. The territory was found to possess significant natural resources, primarily non-ferrous metals including uranium, lead, zinc, copper, gold, silver and rare metals.

The city is now a major industrial centre situated near key strategic facilities, including the Ulba metallurgy plant, which also hosts the IAEA low-enriched uranium bank launched last year; Kazzinc plant, a leading zinc producer; Ust-Kamenogorsk titanium and magnesium plant and Bipek Avto-Azia Avto, Kazakhstan's largest automobile company. The region also hosts numerous thermoelectric

power stations and five hydropower plants.

Locals and foreigners take advantage of the city's setting near high mountains, rivers and lakes during snowy winters and hot summers, especially since the region has more than 40 percent of the nation's total water reservoirs including Bukhtarma, one of the country's largest.

In summer, one can enjoy a pleasant vacation near sandy beaches at good quality and decent prices that are increasingly attracting tourists from abroad. Some guests own houses, while others rent them starting from 5,000

tenge (US\$15.50) per day. The city is approximately an hour from the nearest vacation zone, where breathtaking scenery via steep serpentine roads can add a bit of enjoyment and adrenaline to one's journey.

In winter, the region's ski resorts and centres welcome visitors with their snowy hills equipped for beginners and the more experienced. Prices are relatively inexpensive compared to the popular Shymbulak Resort in Almaty.

Ust-Kamenogorsk itself has a variety of sightseeing options to offer its guests. Walking along the river embankment is a "must" to

see the confluence of the two rivers, more commonly known as Strelka (which can be translated as confluence from Russian).

The city also boasts the Victory Memorial and eternal flame honouring victims of the Great Patriotic War, where people continue to lay flowers to pay tribute to veterans and victims.

Ethno Park, on the left bank of the Irtysh, is another highlight, as it provides a glance into Kazakhstan's history and its cultural and ethnic diversity. The park has a house and exhibits which belonged to different ethnicities who once lived and continue to reside in Kazakhstan. One can visit a Kazakh yurt and Russian, Ukrainian, Korean, German, Armenian and Azerbaijani houses and yards.

A Hollywood-like Kazakhstan sign situated on Ablaketka Mountain, 522 metres above sea level, is another famous site. Many weddings and dates make a point of visiting this charming spot and enjoying the panoramic view.

Ust-Kamenogorsk has an international airport, so travel should not be a problem. Though at present the international network route includes only Antalya, Moscow and Novosibirsk, regular flights and trains connect the city to the capital and Almaty as well as other Kazakh regions.



Photo credit: alphas.alp.kz

Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve – on the way to Great Silk Road

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – Picturesque Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve has developed tourist routes and launched a tulip festival as part of the Great Silk Road cluster revival. Far from the urban bustle, travellers witness the beauty of nature and rare breeds of South Kazakhstan. The first nature reserve in Central Asia, it has saved flora and fauna of the region since 1926.

Two Belgian tourists, Jo Devriend and Veronika Van Acker, recently wrote of their experiences at Aksu-Zhabagly and nearby Zhabagly village. They tasted Kazakh cuisine and learned about kokpar, a traditional game on horseback where riders struggle for a goat's carcass or skin. As it is a protected area, all tours must be planned a day in advance and guided by a ranger. Van Acker noted their tour included a trip to the nature museum with animals added to the Red Book.

"Our group of three tourists and two locals visited this beautiful reserve for three days, each day hiking a different tour. We were there in late September and could not see a brown bear or lynx. Nevertheless, rangers led us to wildlife tracks and showed an excellent knowledge of local flora," she wrote.

The nomads of the Great Silk Road travelled on horses and Aksu-Zhabagly provides riding along the foothills and lower mountain belt on the Taldybulak and Zhetysai routes. Minibuses and cars are also available.

The reserve offers walks to the hills where Greig and Kaufmann tulips grow, species listed on the Red List. Last spring's festival al-

lowed tourists to take photos in the field.

Visitors can see Tien Shan bears, Siberian mountain goats, roe deer and endemic redheaded titmouse on the Kishi-Kaiyndy Gorge trail, where griffin vultures and berkut [golden eagle] fly overhead. Walking on the dry meadow, a golden eagle nest can be found on the opposite bank of the Kishi-Kaiyndy River. Bronze Age and Early Iron Age cave paintings are on the Boidaksai Lake Gorge-Peak Kaskabulak route.

Named for the Aksu and Zhabagly rivers, the reserve was created to protect their nearby flora and fauna. The former, a mountain river with a rapid stream, leads to a canyon. The Aksu Canyon is not only compared to the United States Grand Canyon, it is also famous for its ancient petroglyphs, carvings or painted images on a stone base. The Aksu River turns the colour of milk in the summer months, which explains its name; in Kazakh, Ak is white and su is water. There are also 114 glaciers; the largest, Bugilitur, is popular among tourists as many red deer live there.

Guests can stay in Zhabagly, where a hotel in the village provides a room and three meals per day for each person. Should visitors have preferences, the menu can be discussed with the administration. One day in a deluxe room, entrance to the reserve and museum, horseback riding with the ranger and minibus rent will cost about \$55 per person.

Tourists can reach the nature reserve by train and bus from Almaty or Shymkent. The Aksu-Zhabagly administration meets customers at the nearby Shymkent or Taraz airports or delivers them to the hotel from the airport and Tyul'kubas railway station.

Imantau: pearl of Blue Mountains in North Kazakhstan

By Meruyert Abugaliyeva

ASTANA – Imantau natural zone, in the North Kazakhstan region, is popular with tourists keen on fishing and camping. Its low mountains, beautiful lake and dense forests are within Kokshetau (Kazakh for Blue Mountain) National Park.

The natural zone occupies a large portion of Aiyrtau region, stretching 70 kilometres north to south and 65 kilometres east to west. The mountains, forests and lakes form a spe-

cial microclimate, providing habitat for elk, deer, wild boar, badgers and foxes. Angling enthusiasts appreciate the opportunity to visit Imantau Lake, which is rich in carp, perch, pike and crucian carp.

The waterway, located 400 kilometres from the capital, attracts tourists who enjoy spending a night in a tent in the mountain foothills. The average depth is 5.7 metres, although it reaches a maximum of 10 metres; it is 13.1 kilometres long and 4.8 kilometres wide. The southwest shore of the fresh lake is steep, rocky

and covered with predominantly pine forest. The northwest is a sandy bay and the other coasts are flat and covered with vegetation typical of the steppe.

Tourists can use the services of Visit Burabay (instagram @visitburabay), a community which organises adventure trips throughout Kazakhstan.

"Once you get to Imantau, you can go straight to the foot of the mountain and see a camping site with numerous tents there. Although it is difficult to climb the rocky mountain and the wind is strong there, the view from the top is spectacular. The scenery is completely different from that in Burabay; there are no crowds and the water is especially clean. So, I believe that the pristine nature of Imantau is perfect for tourists who want to go off the beaten track," said team member Assan Toleu.

The special feature of the lake is the 16-hectare, heart-shaped island. Juniper bushes grow on the outer part, while the inner portion is filled with pine, birch, cherry trees and berries. Tourists can reach the uninhabited land by boat.

Imantau zone is easily accessible, as roads from Kokshetau and

Kostanai lead to the village of the same name. Visitors are advised to take a crossover or a four-wheel drive vehicle.

"We drove from Astana to Kokshetau and then went to Imantau using GPS. Although the highway to Burabay is good, the road to Imantau village is bumpy. So, you need to make sure your car is reliable. There are not many housing facilities, although there are a few houses available for rent, since people mostly stay in tents. We made friends with Russian tourists who come to Imantau every summer from Omsk and Tyumen. They stay there for weeks living in tents and cooking food outside," said Toleu.

Several nearby residential facilities are available in addition to the camp site. Solnechnoe, for example, provides different types of houses as well as traditional Kazakh yurts, therapeutic services using horns and antler's blood and guided tours of the region.

Kokshetau National Park also includes Aiyrtau, Shalkar and Zerenda natural zones. Saumalkol and Zerenda lakes, like Imantau, are fresh; Shalkar Lake is famous for its salty water and therapeutic mud.



Photo credit: yvision.kz



Tau-teke Central Asian mountain goat.

Photo credit: aksu-zhabagly.kz

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

Skier's bronze medal more than 20 years in the making

By Anuar Abdрахmanov

PYEONGCHANG – Kazakh Winter Olympic Team Head Coach Yelena Kruglykhina said recently that Kazakh skier Julia Galysheva's Olympic bronze medal in PyeongChang in the moguls was more than 20 years in the making.

"This is the result of many years of work. Not everyone can win an Olympic medal, and you need to be born that way. Fortunately, our East Kazakhstan region, our city is a favourable place for talents such as Yulia Galysheva, Pavel Kolmakov, Dmitry Reikherd and Ayaulym Amrenova. Our entire coaching staff is also from Ust-Kamenogorsk. The goal of achieving such high results was set 20 years ago by our first coaches Viktor Lemeshko and Vladimir Svetlov,

who were doing this sport out of sheer enthusiasm. They trained a great number of athletes. Today, there are those who achieve great success," said Kruglykhina.

Galysheva's medal was Kazakhstan's first and only at the South Korean games and Kazakhstan's first ever medal in freestyle skiing.

Galysheva also won gold medals at the Asian Games 2011 and Universiade 2015. Many felt she should have won a medal at the Sochi Olympics and the athlete contemplated leaving the sport after the judges failed to award her a medal at those games. But she changed her mind and worked with Kruglykhina and other coaches to compete in Seoul.

"We always prepare a few jumps for the athletes. The more different elements you have, the more chances to achieve great results.

But this is the Olympics, this is a great responsibility, people expect you to win medals, so you should be very careful. We chose the maximum programme that Yulia could perform, considering her psychological preparation, because physically all the athletes are ready. Success is achieved only by those who are stronger psychologically," Kruglykhina believes.

Kruglykhina also noted that Galysheva received offers after the Sochi Olympics to compete on behalf of other countries but remained with the Kazakh team.

"Galysheva never wanted to change the country, she only wanted support. Kazakhstan will not let go of such an athlete as Yulia, who steadily wins medals at international competitions. We received support, thanks to which we managed to win an Olympic medal," said Kruglykhina.



2014 figure skating medal winner Denis Ten comes up short in PyeongChang

By Anuar Abdрахmanov

PYEONGCHANG – Kazakhstan's Sochi Olympics bronze medal winner Denis Ten found himself in 27th place here overall after his figure skating performance at the PyeongChang Games, failing to reach the finals after the short programme and earning 70.12 points.

According to the skater himself, the injuries that plagued him throughout the season also affected his Olympic performance. Ten ruptured his ankle ligaments in August 2017, ahead of an ice show in Korea. Doctors gave permission for him to continue to train under the supervision of specialists.

But this is far from Ten's first injury. The first time the skater was told he needed to rest and heal was after an unsuccessful performance at the 2016 World Championship in Boston, where he took 12th place. However, Ten continued to work, even though after the 2014 Olympics, other leading figure skaters decided to take a break to recover.

"This was definitely not my best performance. As I said before, this season was very difficult for me. I am glad and proud that I still managed to take part in the Olympic Games in South Korea. I literally go to bed with pain in my legs every night and wake up hoping that a new day is a moment for new achievements. Every day is a struggle for me. Unfortunately, not everything worked out well, but this is not a reason for being upset. I will try to bounce back in the future," Ten said after his PyeongChang competition was over.

He said he intends to continue to fight and return to the top ranks of global figure skating again.

"I am very happy to be the

first athlete in the history of Kazakhstan's figure skating to win an Olympic medal. It's a pity we still don't have a growing generation of men's figure skaters, those who could give me the chance to take a break for at least a year to heal the injuries. Injuries are like dominoes. One injury follows another. It's very hard. Sport means daily stress for the human body. Despite all the difficulties, I train every day, and I had many opportunities to do something different in life. That might be why I wanted to finish my career after the Sochi Olympics. But I still love sports and I want to make all my fans happy," Ten added.

The athlete stressed that in recent years, Kazakhstan has made impressive achievements in sport.

"Kazakh journalists come to the Olympics. Our people are interested in figure skating, such major competitions as the Universiade 2017 are held in our country, and we competed for the right to host the Olympics, so I can conclude that winter sports are developing in Kazakhstan. This is also thanks to the efforts of our athletes such as Vladimir Smirnov, Yuliya Galysheva, Yelena Khrustaleva. It's nice that Kazakhstan is known in the world figure skating arena. I am grateful to all the people of Kazakhstan for keeping an eye on my career, for helping us move forward. This is the most important thing," said Ten.

Ten, who is of Korean heritage, is very popular in South Korea. A few days before the skating competition kicked off, one of the local TV channels showed a one-hour documentary about his ancestors and his journey to his victories at the world championships and the Olympics.



Astana FC makes incredible comeback in Europa League match against Portugal's Sporting

By Anuar Abdрахmanov

The return match of Europa League's 1/16 round between Kazakhstan's Astana FC and Portugal's Sporting ended in a 3-3 draw in Lisbon on Feb. 22.

The fate of the two matches was predetermined in the first game in Astana, when the Portuguese took a confident 3-1 win, so very few expected a satisfactory result from Astana. In addition, because of Yuri Logvinenko's red card in the first game, Astana lost its main defender for the away match.

The Portuguese took the lead in the first minutes. Fabio Coentrao

made a perfect high cross from the wing, which Sporting's forward Bas Dost headed into the net. Sporting continued to control the ball, but let Astana play and left free space for a maneuver. Astana managed to win back closer near the end of the first half. Dorde Despotovic hit the bar, but Marin Tomasov later scored on a corner kick to tie the game.

Sporting found another loophole in Astana's defence to start the second half. Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes made an accurate shot into the Kazakh net, then followed a few minutes later with a second goal to increase the difference to 3-1. The Kazakh team, however, did not give up. Mid-

fielder Patrick Twumasi scored a goal and a bit later defender Dmitry Shomko made it 3-3 with a long ranger.

The Kazakh champs finished the European Cups with another record, as the first of the nation's clubs to reach the Europa League playoffs.

"I am satisfied with my team's result. We came here to play football, to attack instead of playing in the defence, and did not think about the score. We wanted to play open and score goals. Unfortunately, we missed some goals as well... But if you tie with Sporting, it is a great result. If we had realised our chances in the first half, we could have put

Sporting under great pressure. We didn't score and Sporting punished us due to the individual classes of players. But I think we played like any European team. Despite all our problems, we showed football at the level of the quarter-finals. I wish Sporting good luck and may they win it," said Astana head coach Stanimir Stoilov after the game.

"We wanted to show our game in Portugal, to achieve a positive result. We did it. An important thing was the support of fans, both in Kazakhstan and here at the stadium in Lisbon. There were a lot of them today, so I would like to thank our fans for their support, which we felt throughout the game," said Shomko.



Photo credit: fc.kz

DISCOVER KAZAKHSTAN WITH A NEW APP

A unique digital product – "Kazakhstan – Land of the Great Steppe" – is one-of-a-kind high quality interactive application, presenting multimedia on the most representative geographic, political, touristic, historical, economic facts about Kazakhstan. It contains hundreds of high quality unique photographs, videos, 3D objects, panoramic tours, interactive charts, and innovative maps. It should be of interest to anyone who wants to learn about the world's ninth largest country, including tourists, students, and business people. Available in English, Russian, and Kazakh.

Mobile device versions are available in AppStore and PlayMarket. Also available in Windows and as a web version.

You can run an application webpage by following the link: <http://bit.ly/28PkZza>

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

ALZHIR museum displays artefacts from Soviet-era female political prisoners

By Aigerim Sadykova

ASTANA – The Akmola Camp for Wives and Mothers of Traitors of the Motherland (ALZHIR) museum has put on display 44 certificates, photos and personal items belonging to Soviet-era female political prisoners.

The ALZHIR camp was established in 1937 for wives, sisters and mothers of Soviet poets, political and public figures, labelled enemies of the state. They were deprived of their surname, nationality and profession, known only as enemies and traitors of the motherland. After two years, the women were allowed to send correspondence, inquiring about the fate of their husbands and children.

Almost 18,000 women of 62 nationalities across the USSR were arrested and convicted as wives of enemies and family members of traitors until 1953.

The 44 items were restored over the last three years and include more than 30 documents related to political repression and totalitarianism victims in the 1930s, according to the Astana mayor's office website. The restoration was part of the national Modernisation of Kazakhstan's Identity programme, said Museum Curator Zhanar Yergeldina.

"Ten original documents of pris-



oner Rosa Tsyapkina underwent the restoration, including photos, vari-

ous certificates and letters to her son," said Yergeldina.

Deported from Minsk to ALZHIR and sentenced to eight

years, Tsyapkina sent letters to her son Ben from the camp in 1937-

1938. Keeping her letters, Ben granted the museum permission to restore them.

The museum curator also shared the story of prisoner Mariya Minkina who wrote a letter on a train on her way to the camp asking her relatives to take care of her children and not put them in an orphanage.

Other restored items belonged to Gainizhamal Gaisina, Gertrude Platais, Rakhil Turkina, Tatiana Shakhova and Irina Shubrikova.

Shubrikova worked on a research project on soil corrosion in the camp from 1938. After the liberation in 1945, she decided to stay in Malinovka village. Awarded with the Certificate of Honour of the USSR State Farms Ministry, she received medals for her labour in 1957.

Last summer and autumn, President of Latvia Raimonds Vejonis and President of Poland Andrzej Duda visited the museum. They thanked the employees for preserving the memory of these tragic events in history that must not be repeated.

ALZHIR museum was founded in 2007 and is in possession of 15,000 artefacts. The museum is located 30-minutes' drive from Astana in the village of Akmol and is open Tuesday through Sunday.

Kazakh Agrotechnical University to be country's centre for agro-sector digitisation



L-R: University Rector Akhlybek Kurishbayev, Akmola region governor Malik Murzalin and Executive Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture Yermek Kosherbayev.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ASTANA – Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical University will become the scientific and methodological centre for digitisation in the agro-industrial sector, university rector Akhlybek Kurishbayev said at a Feb. 16 press conference marking the beginning of a new phase of cooperation between the university and the local government.

The university and the Akmola region akimat (local executive body) on Feb. 16 signed a memorandum on cooperation in the field of scientific and innovative development of the agro-industrial sector. The cooperation is intended to benefit both sides: it will improve the quality of student learning while farmers will receive new

technologies and modern production methods.

"According to our proposal, we will now choose two farms in the Akmola, North Kazakhstan, Kostanai and Karaganda regions, according to the lion's share of the country's grain production, to demonstrate what the precision technology is, what it gives and how it decreases costs. This year, two projects will be launched and each farm will be a smart technology centre," he said.

The collaboration will focus on three main directions: the implementation of innovation in agriculture and the transfer of foreign technology, employment of young qualified specialists, and distribution of knowledge among regional manufacturers.

Kazakh President Nursultan

Nazarbayev has set a national goal of developing the agro-industrial sector using smart technologies. This cooperation is the first step in implementing this initiative, said Kurishbayev.

The university also intends to collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture, as the Project Management Centre will be located at the university.

Labour productivity in the agro-industrial sector and export of processed agricultural products is expected to increase by at least 2.5 times within five years. Digital technology will help achieve this.

The university will participate in the process of technological re-equipment of production.

"We can control issues related to land management in crop production. Last year we won the contest and the university can monitor harvesting in the northern regions. Our scientists can also help carry out selection and breeding work, large-scale breeding, artificial insemination of cows, boning livestock. Graduate students can take part in carrying out veterinary and preventive measures throughout the region as part of the Vetservis regional utilities. They will get invaluable practical skills to become highly qualified specialists," he said.

The university plans to organise training courses for regional specialists in all directions on a regular basis.

The agrotechnical university has 20 partner institutions abroad. The University of California in Davis is the major partner in running educational and research systems reforms.

Akmola region Akim (Governor) Malik Murzalin spoke about the current agricultural situation in the region.

The region is one of the largest agricultural producers. It produces 25 percent of Kazakhstan's cereals, 7 percent of its milk and 6 percent of its meat. Last year, the harvest was 5.2 million tonnes of grain. Every year, the region exports 1.8-2 million tonnes.

"Good results were achieved due to state support. Last year about 38 billion tenge [US\$118 million] was allocated for subsidising the industry. More than 29 billion tenge [US\$90 million] at minimal interest rates was provided through various financial institutions. This allowed us to increase the number of agricultural producers who

received government support 1.4 times and provide 1.5 times more fertilisers," he said.

In addition, there is a positive tendency in the growth of livestock and livestock production. Cattle stock increased by 2 percent.

Murzalin stressed that farmers


are in need of new ideas and proposals to implement in production.

"We have high hopes for the memorandum and look forward to the results of our cooperation," he said.



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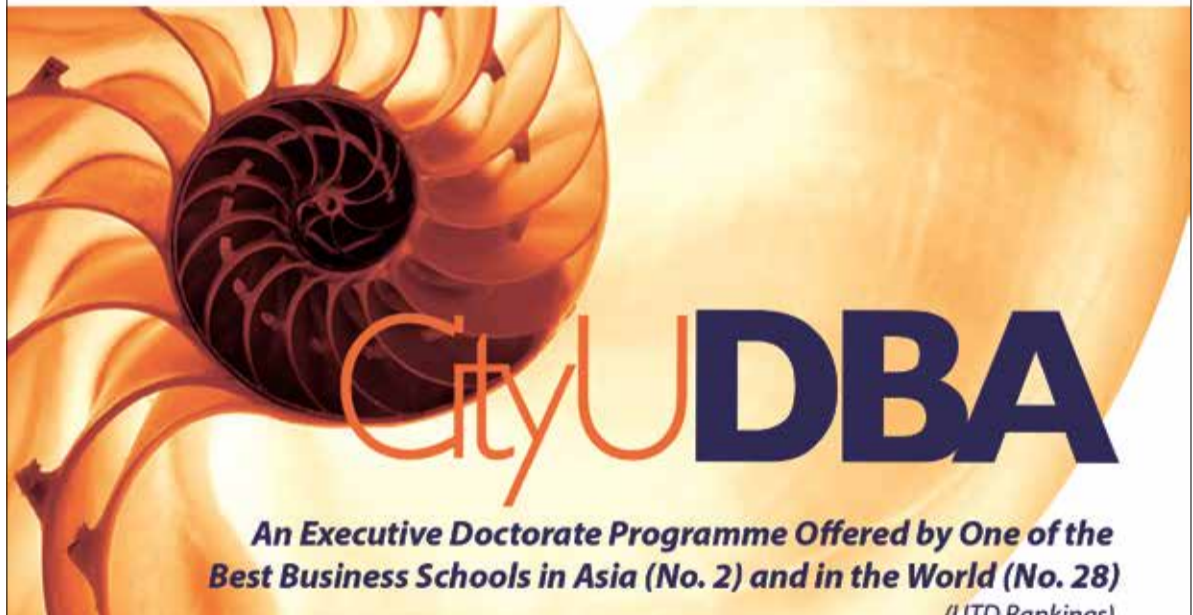
specific services are expected to be installed at regional offices. Scientists are invited to take part in seminars and meetings dedicated to agricultural development issues. Students now have the opportunity to participate in internships during the harvest campaigns.





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