



## Kazakh, Swiss presidents discuss cooperation opportunities



L-R: Ueli Maurer and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Swiss President Ueli Maurer and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev discussed international and business cooperation opportunities Nov. 22 during the former's visit to the Central Asian country. "The two nations have maintained international relationships for a long time, both politically and economically. More than 40 Swiss companies work in Kazakhstan and they feel comfortable here. We are happy that our relationships are friendly, open and transparent. I am grateful to Kazakhstan for the invitation," said

Maurer during the joint press conference after his talks with Tokayev. "We are interested in further strengthening our cooperation, which could use Kazakhstan's and Switzerland's capabilities. Our meeting today is a proof of it. I am sure that developing the cooperation meets the long-term interests of our friendly nations. For Kazakhstan, Switzerland is an important strategic partner in Europe," added Tokayev. Maurer noted Switzerland is focused on working on global platforms. The nation is home to many international organisations, including the UN's second largest office in Geneva, and involved in humanitarian aid throughout the

world. Kazakhstan's geostrategic position between Asia and Europe allows it to function as a bridge. "We are complementing each other in the work of international platforms. We represent similar positions and have similar values. I am convinced that small independent nations such as Kazakhstan and Switzerland should play a big role on an international field. In performing this role, our cooperation is important," he added. Tokayev noted Kazakhstan, like the rest of the world, has acknowledged Switzerland's experience in democracy, a multiparty system and foreign policy for centuries. "The preamble to the Swiss con-

stitution says that the strength of a nation is measured in the well-being of the weak. I agree with this statement," he added. The presidents agreed to continue international collaboration. Tokayev noted Kazakhstan is providing a space for Syrian peace talks, which complement the Geneva talks. "During the meeting, I appreciated the humanitarian component of Swiss foreign policy. Switzerland initiated the adoption of this policy in September 2015 as the United Nations' goal. It was the first to spend millions to aid affected civilians in conflict zones, including Ukraine and Syria," said Tokayev. **Continued on Page A3**

## Nazarbayev's book on Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament translated into Norwegian

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh Embassy in Norway presented the Norwegian translation of First President Nursultan Nazarbayev's book "The Epicentre of Peace" Nov. 21 at the House of Literature in Oslo. Norwegians will be able to get closer to the history of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and Kazakhstan's renunciation of nuclear weapons. "Knowledge and input that can give new strength to the work of nuclear weapons removal are important. The experience from Kazakhstan that this book tells about is in this respect useful. The country deserves recognition that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they removed all nuclear weapons and installations from their own

soil. This serves as a good example for others," Kjell Magne Bondevik, former Norwegian prime minister and executive chair of the Oslo Centre, wrote in the preface, reported NTB Kommunikasjon. This book is Nazarbayev's "reflection on the progressive danger of the dictate of power over reason, on the difficult search by personkind for the formula of nuclear security," as the author himself wrote in the original foreword. "The Epicentre of Peace" unveils the story of how the Kazakh people chose to rid the country of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union's Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in the East Kazakhstan Region was the location for hundreds of nuclear weapon tests that affected the neighbouring cities, villages and environment.

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## Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan to build fibre-optic link under Caspian Sea

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin and Azerbaijani Prime Minister Ali Asadov officially launched construction of a fibre-optic line between the countries under the Caspian Sea Nov. 19 in Aktau, Kazakhstan, reports primeminister.kz. "It will allow you [Azerbaijan] to reach a higher level of development of high-speed and secure data transmission infrastructure, join the leading Europe-Asia trunk routes and take your rightful place in world data transit," Mamin told Asadov about the project's benefits. The project is designed to be transcontinental and to create a digital telecommunications corridor between Europe and Asia. The cable is projected to be 380-400 kilometres long. Kazakhstan's Transtelecom and KazTransCom and Azerbaijani telecom operator AzerTelecom will lay the cable, which is expected to be put into operation by the end of 2021. It will allow the transmission of data with a capacity of at least four terabits per second. Mamin and Asadov also discussed the current state of and prospects for cooperation between

their countries in trade, investment, transport and logistics, agriculture, space and cultural and humanitarian work. Kazakh Minister of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry Askar Zhumagaliyev also issued a statement regarding the launch of the links the same day, estimating the potential revenue for Kazakhstan to reach \$300 million, reports the KazTAG news agency. "This communication line connects Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. However, if you look more globally, this line will allow for the transit of traffic from China through our countries to Europe. Why is it beneficial to Kazakhstan? We expect data transit revenue to reach \$300 million. This process can be compared to building a quality road: freight traffic immediately increases along it, budget revenues grow, roadside service develops, and so on," Zhumagaliyev said of what Kazakhstan might reap from the new data connection. Investment in the project is estimated to be approximately \$60 million, and the data link is projected to create up to 150 jobs. The final fibre-optic route will connect China, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Germany.

## Nur-Sultan's embassies donate baskets of national products to Dec. 1 Christmas Charity Bazaar

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The Ambassadors Spouses Astana (ASA) association presented baskets of products and goods donated by embassies and sponsors for the 12th Christmas Charity Bazaar at the Basket Day event in Nur-Sultan Nov. 25. Fifty-three embassies have donated baskets for the bazaar, which will be held Dec. 1 from 11 a.m. to

6 p.m. in the Radisson Hotel Astana, which has served as the general sponsor of the event for 12 straight years now. The money from Charity Bazaar sales will go toward the charity fund. "Today's event is an opportunity for all the ambassadors and their wives to deliver their baskets going to the raffle. Every basket contains food products of the country that they represent. It is just an occasion for us to give a little extra to the raffle," Patricia Gifford,

wife of the British ambassador to Kazakhstan, said. Visitors to the bazaar can sample the national food of 53 countries at once. Participating embassies can introduce visitors to their culture through their national products. "This makes it unique – that you can get, for example, original Swiss cheese from Switzerland," said ASA President Luzia Sebesta Schmid, wife of the Swiss ambassador. The highlight of the bazaar is

its Grand Raffle. Tickets that sell for 1,000 tenge (\$2.60) can earn a lucky few prizes like a Lada Granta car, a ferry cruise, trips to Abu Dhabi, Istanbul, Riga and Sharja, as well as to one of the three destinations to choose from those serviced by Air Astana, a spa visit and other treats. Eighty-seven companies and organisations are sponsoring prizes at this year's bazaar. The list of sponsors also includes The Astana Times and The ATOM Project. **Continued on Page B8**



Members of ASA association at the Basket Day event in Nur-Sultan on Nov. 25.

## Yerzhan Maksim places second in Junior Eurovision Song Contest

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Yerzhan Maksim, a young talent representing Kazakhstan at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2019 in Gliwice, Poland, took second place in the competition, scoring 227 points. Maksim, 10th in the lineup on Nov. 24, performed "Armanyňan Qalma" ("Do Not Betray Your Dream").

The composition is a call to never give up and trust in the universe to open its doors. In his first interview after the results were announced, Maksim said, "Second place is good! But, of course, first would be much better! I want to thank all the Kazakh people for their great support! To date I plan to give a concert in Poland. Then I will perform in London, Moscow and other cities." **Continued on Page B3**

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# NATION

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## First eight months of Tokayev's presidency put spotlight on gradual civil society, business support and public engagement reforms

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

**NUR-SULTAN** – The first eight months of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's term have been marked by developing and implementing new approaches and solutions towards strengthening a socially oriented and business friendly state.

He announced plans at the June 12 inauguration ceremony to continue the strategies developed by Kazakhstan's First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, including the Modernisation of Kazakhstan's Identity and Five Institutional Reforms.

"Today, we are able to double the achievements of our independence and to bring our country to a qualitatively new stage of development. We can achieve this by maintaining the continuity of the policy of the leader of the nation and through systemic reforms. As you know, this was the basis of my pre-election programme. At the moment, state bodies are doing the necessary work to implement it," said Tokayev Sept. 2 in his first state-of-the-nation address.

### Participation

#### in government meetings

Speaking at the July 15 government meeting, Tokayev instructed officials to provide immediate debt relief to some of the country's most vulnerable groups – large families and people with disabilities. By the end of the summer, the debt relief was effected, impacting the lives of more than one million people.

He called for the government to conduct an audit of all agricultural land and digitise the land registry system by the end of 2020 after the Ministry of Agriculture reported on 16.5 million unused hectares.

"Land is the main factor of production. Without efficiency and transparency, we cannot develop our rural areas. We understand that this is a difficult job; here, you need a harmonious interaction of the ministries of agriculture and digital development," he said.

A theft investigation project will be conducted on light rail transport (LRT) construction in the capital to prevent poor quality and ineffective project planning funded with budget money.

Functioning platforms for feedback from the population are of great importance. Particular atten-



President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev delivers remarks at the first meeting of the National Council of Public Trust on Sept. 6 in the Kazakh capital.

tion should be paid to work with social networks.

Tokayev established the National Council of Public Trust July 17 to promote the concept of a "listening state." Its main objective is to "formulate suggestions and recommendations on the current issues of the state policy based on a broad discussion with the representatives of society, political parties and civil society," reads the decree.

Its list of members includes 44 public figures, civil society and human rights activists, journalists, children's rights commissioners and an ombudsman to protect entrepreneurs. After its initial meeting in September, the council is expected to reconvene shortly to take stock of the progress made so far in drafting reform proposals.

### First State of the Nation Address

The state-of-the-nation address focused on constructive public dialogue as a basis for a stable and prosperous Kazakhstan.

Tokayev instructed the government and legislators to help strengthen civil society and social security, support domestic businesses and develop the economy. Political transformation "will be implemented gradually, taking into account interests of the state and people," he said.

Civil society's involvement in shaping government policies is a priority. The President also instructed officials to allow peaceful public rallies.

"If peaceful protests do not pursue the goal of violating the law and the peace of citizens, then they should be embraced and given approval to be carried out in the manner prescribed by law, to allocate special places for this, and not in the outskirts of cities," he said.

A 25-percent reduction in the number of civil servants and national company employees is expected by 2024.

The President noted punishments for drug dealing, paedophilia, sexual assault and other serious violations of the law should be toughened.

Reforming the law enforcement system is one of the most pressing tasks and the work of the Committee of Administrative Police is expected to be reorganised by the end of the year.

"The image of the police, as a power tool of the state, will gradually become a thing of the past; it will become a body providing services to citizens to ensure their safety," said Tokayev.

Effective small and medium-sized businesses are seen as "a solid foundation for the development of cities and villages." Approximately 100 billion tenge (US\$260 million) has been allocated from

the National Fund to support businesses and the government will allocate an additional 250 billion tenge (US\$647 million) for the next three years as part of the Business Roadmap.

A three-year ban on inspections of micro and small businesses will come into force in January.

The President also addressed an issue of public concern, noting "our land is not for sale to foreigners."

He set the goal of increasing teachers' salaries two-fold over four years, and their salaries will grow already by 25 percent in 2020.

To create equal opportunities for individuals with special needs, the government will allocate at least 58 billion tenge (US\$150 million) over three years, a programme included in Tokayev's election platform.

Next year has been declared the Year of the Volunteer.

"The urgent task is to expand the participation of citizens, especially youth and students, in volunteer activities, to instill in them the skills for an active life. This is an important part of our work to strengthen civil society," he said.

### Participation in major international meetings

The President urged strengthening mutual confidence, constructive dialogue and interaction to ensure security and cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) space at the June 13 SCO heads of state meeting in Bishkek. The SCO Action Plan for 2018-2022 on long-term good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation needs to be fully implemented.

Kazakhstan initiated forming the Global Anti-Terrorist Coalition under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). Tokayev also noted the importance of fighting cyber-related threats.

"Terrorism is a global threat and requires additional efforts to ensure cybersecurity. Establishing the SCO Information Security Centre would be an important contribution to the protection of the organisation's information space," he said.

The President reaffirmed the country's commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world in his Sept. 24 address to the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. He emphasised Kazakhstan's role as a mediator on the regional and global scale because Asia's growing economy

"demands a more integrated continental security architecture."

He proposed transforming the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) into a full-fledged regional organisation for security and development when Kazakhstan assumes its chairmanship in 2020.

The nation "is ready to support bilateral and multilateral actions aimed at finding viable peace and confidence-building solutions" regarding the situation in the Middle East and proposes an inclusive dialogue as a solution.

"Thanks to the Astana Process [on Syria], which complements the Geneva talks, the cessation of hostilities has been reached. The de-escalation zones with conditions for a safe return of refugees have also been established. We all know that conflicts are devastating and give rise to terrorism and extremism. These can only be defeated by joint actions through a Global Anti-Terrorism Network under the auspices of the UN," he said.

Tokayev also shared the results of the Jusan special humanitarian mission.

"Some 595 Kazakh citizens trapped by terrorist propaganda, including 406 children, returned back home from the war zones in Syria. We are ready to share our experience with other countries and urge them to take similar actions," he said.

He noted Kazakhstan's political structure is based on "a strong and visionary president, an influential parliament and an accountable government."

"My ultimate goal is to ensure that millions of my fellow countrymen benefit from large-scale reforms and enjoy an inclusive society, robust economy, high-quality education and advanced healthcare. Kazakhstan will not become a success story in its social-economic development unless profound political transformation is accomplished," he said.

Tokayev's vision is based on the concept of different opinions, but one nation.

"It is through dialogue that we should move forward. Big changes will affect all law enforcement agencies and the courts to uphold the rule of law in every sphere and the everyday life of our citizens. Populism is about mediocre policy. I am not in a position of giving empty promises, but pursuing concrete deeds," he said.

### NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

The number of Kazakh children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) could reach close to 60,000, according to experts at the Bulat Utemuratov Foundation, which implements the Autism. One World for Everyone project. Autism centres are located in Aktobe, Almaty, Kyzylorda, Nur-Sultan, Petropavlovsk, Shymkent, Uralsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk and more than 8,000 children have participated in the support programme since 2015 to improve their quality of life. Approximately 7,200 youngsters are now registered and 3,700 have started the course. "Children just need more attention from specialists and parents. Autism is not a disease, but a special state of development of the child with gaps in communication, social interaction and behaviour. In most cases, these gaps need to be corrected," said Asyl Miras Shymkent Centre head Sabina Umarova at the Nov. 18 meeting in the city.

Bolt taxi service's top destinations in its two-month operation in Nur-Sultan include five shopping malls (Asia Park, Keruen, Keruen City, Khan Shatyr and Mega Silk Way), Nur Sultan-1 railway station, Narikbayev Kazakh State Law University and Astana Medical University, reported the company press service. Taxi service is popular among students, local residents and visitors who prefer to go on business and personal trips by rail and those who spend some of their free time in shopping centres. Approximately 90 percent of orders are made on weekdays, the majority between 7 a.m.-9 a.m. and 6 p.m.-8 p.m. A slight increase is observed from 12 p.m.-2 p.m., a figure which decreases by the middle of the workweek, then steadily rises on Friday.

A digital inclusive laboratory to develop programming skills and creativity opened at Turan University in Almaty, reported Forbes.kz Nov. 22. The project is supported by the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan, ASBIS and Kazakhstan Marketing Association. The courses, Everyone Can Code and Everyone Can Create, developed by the Apple Distinguished Educators (ADE) programme, are available for children, students and specialists in various fields. "Apple Digital Lab is a unique opportunity for students to create high-tech design projects starting from the landing page to interesting video clips. Students will not only learn how to communicate with the target audience, but they will also be able to create commercially significant projects," said university senior teacher Elena Polukhina.

The Ministry of Culture and Sports is planning to create a single operator that implements a policy of providing physical education and sports sponsorships, reported Kazinform Nov. 21. "Its main mission will be to ensure the sustainable development of physical culture and sports. As an operator, it will be engaged in the distribution of extra budget funds for the development of physical education and sports. The operator will receive funds through sponsorship from Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund and other sources not prohibited by the legislation and aimed at implementing social projects for the development of physical culture and sports," said Minister of Culture and Sports Aktoty Raimkulova at a Senate plenary meeting.

BBV presented its intelligent transport system project at the Astana Hub, an international park of IT start-ups. The company's Intelligent Information Navigation Transport Network (IINTS) is an innovative project that develops and integrates Kazakh digital signage software. It manages the traffic flow in large cities, providing relevant information at the right time and place. The network is a digital media board managed with EYWA's proprietary software. BBV received the best digital-signage solution award at the ISE 2018 exhibition of integration solutions in Amsterdam. The company has entered the top ten innovative companies and top ten best start-ups in the country.

## PM reviews pilot project launching medical insurance

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

**NUR-SULTAN** – Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin reviewed the results of the pilot implementation of Mandatory Social Medical Insurance (MSMI) in Karaganda Region Nov. 18, according to his office.

"[Kazakhstan's First President] Nursultan Nazarbayev set the task of ensuring complete readiness for the introduction of the MSMI. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his state-of-the-nation address noted that the issue of implementing social health insurance should be treated with utmost responsibility. It should cover all citizens. For this, medical organisations of all levels must be connected to the necessary information systems. The data on each citizen should be updated," said Mamin.

On Sept. 1, the Ministry of Healthcare launched a pilot project in Karaganda Region to test the MSMI system and prepare for its full-scale rollout. In two months, rehabilitation coverage in the region grew by 42.2 percent. The number of people taking expensive examination such as CT scans and MRIs increased by 192 percent.

The extensive information systems of Karaganda's medical or-

ganisations and the available resources for their improvement was part of the reason the region was chosen for the pilot programme.

With the experience of launching the pilot, "Akimats [regional and city administrations] need to bring their medical information systems' readiness indicator to 100 percent by the end of the year. The current one is 89 percent. In addition, it is necessary to raise awareness among the population using practical cases and ensure that all medical personnel pass a knowledge assessment," said Minister of Healthcare Yelzhan Birtanov, the prime minister's website reports.

A three-level medical care system, including a new model of the Guaranteed Volume of Free Medical Care (GVFMC) and the MSMI package, will commence Jan. 1.

The first level is the new model of the GVFMC, which is now defined by clear boundaries of state obligations and globally recognised international standard for universal coverage for basic health services.

The second level is the MSMI package for the insured population, which ensures the availability of medical care beyond the GVFMC.

The third level is medical services that are not included in the GVFMC or MSMI packages, which patients

will have to pay for or use voluntary health insurance to pay for.

"Currently, 88 percent of the population is predicted to be insured. Among them 10 million people belong to groups receiving social benefits, 5.4 million are employees, 0.7 million are individual entrepreneurs, 0.2 million are Single Aggregate Payment payers. The remaining citizens, approximately 12 percent, will be able to become participants in the system as independent payers," said Birtanov.

The government continues to provide the population with basic medical services such as preventive vaccinations and medical examinations, patronage, pregnancy management and access to emergency care.

The nation's health budget in 2020 will be approximately 1.5 trillion tenge (US\$3.9 billion), including more than 500 billion tenge (US\$1.3 billion) for the MSMI. Financing of priority medical care types based on population needs will increase, including medical rehabilitation, the budget for which will increase seven times next year and up to 11 times by 2025. The salary of medical personnel next year will increase by 30 percent among doctors and 20 percent among nursing staff. By 2025, it will double, compared with current salaries.

## Mazhilis approves stiffer sentences for sexual offenses

By Yelena Levkovich

**NUR-SULTAN** – The Kazakh Mazhilis approved Nov. 20 in first reading new amendments to the country's criminal code to stiffen penalties for various crimes. The amendments follow Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's call for stiffer penalties during his Sept. 2 state-of-the-nation address.

Deputy Prosecutor Marat Akhmetzhanov presented the draft law at the Mazhilis plenary meeting chaired by Speaker Nurlan Nigmatulin.

The amendments are divided into three sections. The first section eliminates conflicts and gaps in the existing criminal legislation. The second deals with sexual assault and the third addresses extremism, illegal cattle-rustling and other crimes.

One important change is the toughening of punishments for sexual offenses. Sexual violence against minors, for example, now falls under the category of extremely grave crimes and would be punishable by deprivation of liberty up to 20 years or life imprisonment.

The bill also envisages criminal

liability for drug dealing. Mazhilis deputies said severe punishments should be given for not only producing or selling drugs, but also for narcotics advertising. Deputy Murat Temirzhanov proposed considering the activity of the so-called stencilers who promote different drugs by making notes on streets, sidewalks and walls, a type of aggressive propaganda, to be punished seriously.

Nigmatulin noted that officials should take a comprehensive approach, also addressing members of law enforcement who contribute to illegal trafficking.

The amendments also strengthen penalties for the illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage and transportation of firearms, gas weapons with the possibility of shooting with traumatic ammunition and short-barrelled smooth-bore weapons, as well as their cartridges.

The legislative amendments also change the procedure of credit for time served by prisoners in certain types of detention facilities. One day inside the maximum-security facility would be equal to one and a half days in a medium-security institution and two days in a minimum-security one.

# EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

The Kazakh capital will host Dec. 10-12 the 14th round of the Syrian peace talks, Kazakh Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Aibek Smadiyarov announced Nov. 25. The talks brokered by Iran, Russia and Turkey, in what has become known as the Astana Process, have been held in the Kazakh capital since January 2017. The platform proposed by Kazakhstan is meant to complement the Geneva Process to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria that has entered its ninth year. Delegations from Iran, Russia and Turkey, the Syrian government and the Syrian armed opposition will be present as well as high-level representatives of the United Nations, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq as observers. The agenda will include the situation in northern and north-western Syria, confidence-building measures, including the release of hostages and the search for missing persons, improving the comprehensive humanitarian assistance to Syria in return of refugees and internally displaced persons and the ways to advance the political process amid the recent launch of the Constitutional Committee.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have agreed to facilitate bilateral agricultural cooperation, as the neighbouring nations signed a roadmap to coordinate activities through 2024. The document includes measures in science, production, certification, trade, digitisation, veterinary and farming. Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin noted the significant potential for increasing agricultural product supplies, implementing investment projects and accessing markets in other countries. Bilateral agricultural trade has generated \$770 million in nine months. Kazakhstan's main exports include wheat and meslin, wheat and wheat-rye flour, sunflower seeds, sugar, cattle and wheat waste. Uzbekistan mainly exports fruits, berries and vegetables.

Kazakhstan ranked 43rd in the 2019 Women, Peace and Security Index published by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in partnership with the Peace Research Institute Oslo. The country, positioned between Jamaica (42nd) and the United Arab Emirates (44th), ranked highest across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia in terms of women's paid employment. Norway, Switzerland and Denmark top the list. The ranking examines 167 countries on women's equality across 11 indicators categorised in three basic dimensions of women's well-being – inclusion (economic, social, political), justice (formal laws and informal discrimination) and security (at family, community and societal levels).

Kazakh director Adilkhan Yerzhanov won the Achievement in Directing award for his "A Dark, Dark Man" at the 13th Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) Nov. 21 in Brisbane, Australia. It is Yerzhanov's second award following the APSA NETPAC Development Prize in 2013, now the Young Cinema Award, for "Constructors." His feature "The Owners" premiered at the Cannes Festival and was also nominated for the APSA Best Feature Film. "The Plague at the Karatas Village" (2016) had its international premier at International Film Festival Rotterdam where it won the NETPAC Award.

Abai Kazakh State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, Kazakhstan's oldest theatre, performed the classic one-act ballets "Chopiniana" and "Scheherazade" Nov. 17 to a full house at the London Coliseum. Dancers Azamat Askarov, Rakhim Dairov, Arisa Hashimoto, Zhanel Tukeyeva, Malika Yelchibaeva and Dinara Yesentaeva performed the principal roles. The tour was supported by the Kazakh Embassy in the United Kingdom and Kazakh Ministry of Culture and Sports. Abai Kazakh State Ballet Artistic Director Gulzhan Tutkibaeva noted the troupe previously performed in France. "Chopiniana" and "Scheherazade" are, of course, iconic ballets that are known internationally and which continue to delight and entertain audiences everywhere," she said.

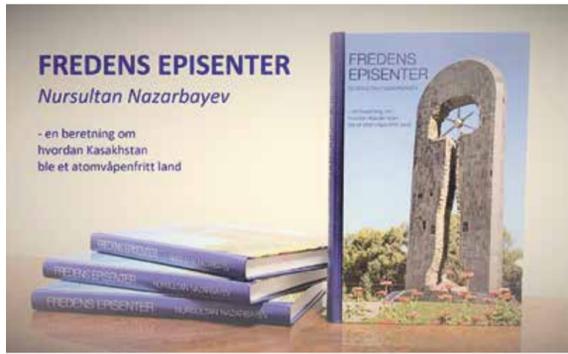
## Nazarbayev's book on Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament translated into Norwegian

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"Nuclear weapons are meaningless weapons. Its use is impossible without catastrophic consequences. Kazakhstan and its First President Nursultan Nazarbayev are among those who realised this. 'The Epicentre of Peace' tells why," said Bondevik during the presentation.

The site was closed Aug. 29, 1991 by Nazarbayev's decree, four full months ahead of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and in defiance of the Soviet leadership. In 2009, the United Nations declared Aug. 29 as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests.

"The 'Epicentre of Peace' not only tells about the history of nu-



clear testing and dismantling the nuclear potential of Kazakhstan, but also invites the reader to think about building a world free of nu-

clear weapons," said Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Norway Yerkin Akhinzhanov during the presenta-

"Kazakhstan was alone in making the fight against nuclear weapons a national hallmark, which has garnered respect and recognition worldwide," Sverre Lodgaard, former director and senior researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), wrote in the preface.

It is "a book of revelation, which I see as an open invitation to a confidential dialogue, disarmament and cooperation," Nazarbayev wrote in the prologue.

Kazakhstan has continued its efforts to push for global nuclear disarmament through, among other efforts, calls for dialogue and greater engagement by the public in this area. The Abolish Testing. Our Mission (ATOM) Project, a

global civic initiative, for example, has been contributing to maintaining the dialogue to end nuclear weapons testing and create a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The ATOM Project Honorary Ambassador, activist and painter Karipbek Kuyukov participated in the book presentation in Oslo and showed his paintings. Born without arms, he uses his mouth and toes to paint and is one of the 1.5 million Kazakhs who suffered from the effects of more than 450 nuclear weapon tests at the former Semipalatinsk test site.

"The paintings help me show the pain and express my view of the world as a victim of nuclear testing and thereby awaken people's emotions," he said.

## Kazakh, Swiss presidents discuss cooperation opportunities

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Kazakhstan's Swiss partners have appreciated the country's achievements during its years of independence under the leadership of First President Nursultan Nazarbayev. They noted it has become a stable and dynamically developing nation.

Maurer and Tokayev agreed the main component of the Swiss-Kazakh relationship is economics.

"We do not want to exchange only goods; we also want to exchange knowledge, experience and technologies. Kazakhstan's big plus is in its growing population; it differentiates Kazakhstan from Switzerland, where the population is growing old. Another important point is understanding

your partner, the way he or she thinks and lives, which could play a positive role in economic relationships. People should get closer, get to know each other, which is why we should open a direct flight from Nur-Sultan to Zurich," said Maurer.

Switzerland is known as a nation with strong industrial innovation, developed agriculture and one of the main financial and banking centres of the world. Kazakhstan, by contrast, is known for its stable economic growth and the best investment climate in the region and Swiss businesses appreciate the opportunities opened by its market. The nation is the third largest investor in the Kazakh economy and one of the country's top ten trade partners.

The volume of Swiss invest-

ment has exceeded \$24 billion in the last 15 years. Heads of its large companies attending the meeting demonstrated their interest in working in the Kazakh market and the sides agreed the country will create all the necessary conditions for their future involvement. Trade turnover has reached \$3 billion this year and the attendees acknowledged diversification is needed to include products other than raw materials.

Kazakhstan has experienced a demand to create innovative enterprises and implement energy sector, agriculture, medicine and pharmaceutical projects. Mechanical engineering, chemical and food industries, transport and logistics, tourism and environmental protection are also expanding fields.

"Considering Switzerland's status as one of the main international financial centres, we think that cooperation in the financial sphere would be beneficial. We noted the possibility of cooperation between Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC) and Swiss financial centres," said Tokayev.

He added Kazakhstan's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), access to the huge Chinese market and possibility to enter Central Asian markets have always been attractive to partners. The country is ready to help Swiss investors interested in opening joint enterprises within its borders to export the final product to neighbouring markets.

Maurer was accompanied by a delegation of businesspeople,

which provided the opportunity to discuss future cooperation in detail, and Kazakh partners will analyse the proposed initiatives.

In a subsequent business forum the sides signed six business deals including a management and franchise agreement between Agbura Development and Swiss Choice Holding to build a "Swiss village" in the Burabai resort area, a memorandum of cooperation on "Development and implementation of a national system for classifying hotels in Kazakhstan," a memorandum of cooperation on "Traceability Labelling System" and memorandums of understanding between Astana International Finance Centre (AIFC) and Swiss companies Blackfort Capital AG, Clarus Capital Group AG and Herculis.

## Kazakh-Italian cooperation offers immense unexplored opportunities, says top Italian official

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan and Italy can offer each other huge opportunities for growth – it is just a matter of time until the two build stronger relations, said Italian Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Manlio Di Stefano in an exclusive interview for this story.

Kazakhstan is seeking ways to diversify its oil-based economy, while Italy is looking for new cooperation opportunities in areas such as agribusiness, technology, cybersecurity and aerospace. These can create a good match and "we just need to choose where you want to add cooperation," he noted.

The countries already enjoy "a good framework of bilateral agreements. Therefore, there is nothing huge to reform," he added.

The door to new opportunities will open with the EPCA (Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement), an agreement between Kazakhstan and the European Union (EU).

"The Italian parliament just approved the ratification of the EPCA. This is an agreement that could bring some new opportunity for the country," said Di Stefano.

The agreement is awaiting the signature of Italian President Sergio Mattarella.

"This (agreement) obviously will boost and improve cooperation between Kazakhstan and the European Union," he added. "I think that now it is just the matter of insisting and stressing on the projects, because there is the demand; there is the market and you need to just put them together."

Agriculture is one of Italy's key economic sectors, accounting for



Italian Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Manlio Di Stefano.

2.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), reported export.gov.

"We are inter-domestically pushing a lot on innovation, what we call Industry 4.0. It is like a big set of reforms to have companies digitalise and to be able to be more interconnected at the global level, then we are pushing a lot on cybersecurity and aerospace, for example. But the reality is that we are starting from a very small company working on agriculture and on to the defence industry; we are trying to innovate every process," said Di Stefano.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has initiated a plan to develop and digitise its farms and agricultural investment support has increased every year. Investments in fixed assets nearly doubled to 263.7 billion tenge (US\$678.8 million) in the first eight months of 2019.

To grow its agroindustry, Kazakhstan needs more foreign in-

vestment and, most importantly, more experienced partner companies, Di Stefano noted.

"This will obviously help the management of all the relationships with the local bureaucracy administration and governance. What we are trying now at the [Kazakh-Italian Business] forum is to match companies, Italian companies with local companies, and start some joint ventures," he added.

Di Stefano noted Kazakhstan is making an effort to provide a comfortable environment for foreign investors and companies. The government, however, still needs to revise its legislation on the way foreign business should operate in the country. The government needs "to create a domestic framework of rules that are internationally recognised, that can protect the investment, and some simplification of the bureaucracy in order to speed up everything," he said.

"In Italy, we have a few big companies and most of them are already based here. But the reality is that more than 90 percent of our economy is made of small and medium enterprises. Small and medium enterprises, they cannot have risks. They are not used to taking risks, because their budgets are not so big. When they try to work abroad, they need to have a certain framework of rules that protect their own investment. That's what I am discussing with your government to fix the procedure that is not in the standard of the union approach in order to facilitate this," he added.

Another deterrent is the lack of a general understanding of what Kazakhstan and the countries in Central Asia represent. For Italian business circles, it is not the fear of the "stans," but simply the lack of awareness about the possibilities of doing business in the region.

"I think that sometimes there is no consciousness of what the 'stans' are. We are talking about the countries in terms of logistics – that are huge in some way and are far away from Italy, but they have a huge potential. We are trying with our government to create some consciousness about it," he said.

While on his November business trip to Central Asia, Di Stefano intends to introduce Italian businesspeople to the region and its many opportunities, he said. The country's business community will have a better chance to become acquainted with everything Central Asia has to offer at the Dec. 13 Italy-Central Asia government and business conference in Rome.

"What we want to have is a conference that is not just commercial,

but it is also about business, culture, science and, in general, political cooperation. And what you want is to make it periodic – every couple of years, for example. So, we want to create this consciousness in Italy to make companies understand that the 'stan' countries are a huge possibility," said Di Stefano.

At the political level, this will also be a means of keeping Central Asia closer to the EU.

"We think that this is a good environment for everyone. You are straight in the centre between Europe and Asia. So, we think that already now, but mostly in the future, you can have a strategic goal for the so-called Eurasian connectivity. So, the more we keep you close to the European Union, the better it is, I think," he added.

The first seed of business cooperation between the countries came at the Kazakh-Italian Business Forum Nov. 13 in the capital. The session gathered approximately 200 representatives of business circles to discuss coordination possibilities in renewable energy, petro chemistry, manufacturing and agribusiness.

Italian energy company GSE signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation with Kazakhstan's AREK energy utility company. In addition, certain businesses have already shown some interest in horse meat processing.

Cooperation between the nations has been strengthening each year since a strategic partnership was formed 10 years ago and Italy is Kazakhstan's second biggest trade partner overall. To date, Italy has invested \$6.6 billion in the Kazakh economy and approximately 270 companies using Italian capital operate in the country.

# ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## Country to tighten hiring practice for foreign workers, counter wage imbalance

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan will tighten the laws regulating the process of hiring foreign workers, after inspections led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection identified labour and migration legislation violations at 63 large enterprises, including disproportionate salaries between the foreign and local workforces, reported *tengrinews.kz* Nov. 3.

The ministry reported on the legislation violations, enterprise inspection results and possible solutions during a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev and heads of the Aktope Region's large enterprises. The session considered compensation, repaying wage liabilities, labour conflicts, businesses' social responsibility and attracting foreign labour.

"We plan to tighten the rules for recruiting foreign labour. We will



Photo credit: *tengrinews.kz*

reduce the quota by no less than two times and tighten the rules for issuing permits for the fourth category (working specialties)," said Minister of Labour and Social Protection Birzhan Nurymbetov.

The plan involves introducing the employer's responsibility and obligation to create equal working and living conditions for employees. The ministry will modify industry inspection criteria, annually

checking enterprises that attract more than 30 foreign workers.

Nurymbetov noted 21,000 foreign specialists have permission to work at 2,400 Kazakh enterprises.

"With the Prosecutor General's Office, we inspected 63 large enterprises. The inspection revealed 794 facts of labour legislation violations, including 700 facts of wage imbalance at 23 enterprises, meaning the salary of foreign spe-

cialists for one position was higher than that of Kazakh employees. With regard to this, we revoked the permissions of 657 foreign workers," he said.

He added the government bodies issued 56 orders regarding violations that revealed and imposed 282 fines totalling 87 million tenge (US\$224,000).

The second inspection stage checked 34 additional enterprises and identified 135 labour violations. Nurymbetov specifically addressed Arabtec Consolidated Contractors Limited Project Manager John Campbell regarding violations at the Abu Dhabi Plaza construction site.

"For example, you provide three meals a day for foreigners living in a hostel, the cost of which is up to 3,000 tenge (US\$8). The local staff, they dine separately, with compensation payments of 800 tenge (US\$2). In addition, your company attracted foreign workers that do not correspond to the

position for which you received permission," he said.

The ministry also plans to return to the compulsory practice of replacing foreign workers with domestic specialists.

"You will get permission to attract a foreign specialist for one-three years, but after the term expiration the employee needs to be replaced by a Kazakh specialist. We have been attracting foreign labour for 25 years. I think that time was enough to train our own specialists," added Nurymbetov.

Saparbayev supported the minister's proposals.

"If we invite a foreign worker, then after a certain time we must replace him with a domestic worker. We have enough universities and enterprises. For a quarter of a century we have been attracting foreign workers, but we are not preparing our own. Perhaps next year we will exclude the issuance of permits for the fourth category," he said.

### ECONOMIC NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan's local budget revenues jumped 19.4 percent in the first nine months of 2019 to a record 4.2 trillion tenge (US\$10.89 billion). The revenue plan was exceeded in all regions of the country except the capital. Local budgets' own revenues exceeded 120 billion tenge (US\$311.12 million). Excluding transfers, the revenues totalled 1.8 trillion tenge (US\$4.67 billion), 119 billion tenge (US\$308.52 million) more than in the same period in 2018. Growth is mainly due to taxes, as tax revenues increased 7.5 percent to 1.7 trillion tenge (US\$4.41 billion). The sale of fixed capital and non-tax revenues was 68.7 billion tenge (US\$178.11 million) and 47.7 billion tenge (US\$123.67 million), respectively.

Investments in fixed assets sourced from bank loans declined 64.4 percent from January-October to 227.3 billion tenge (US\$589.30 million), falling for the first time in the past few years. The share of loans from foreign banks does not exceed 0.1 percent of Kazakhstan's total capital investments. At the same time, investments in fixed assets through foreign bank loans totalled 9.3 billion tenge (US\$24.11), 58.7 percent less year-on-year (yoy). Capital expenditures from foreign bank loans are declining for the second year in a row.

As of the end of September, tenge deposits represented 55.6 percent of all Kazakh bank deposits. The country's bank deposits increased 4.2 percent year-on-year (yoy) to 8.8 trillion tenge (US\$22.8 billion). The systematic growth of bank savings is accompanied by an increase in demand for the national currency, reported ranking.kz. Deposits have grown 15.5 percent in the past five years, which reflects an increase in the population's well-being. This is also evident from other indicators, such as a 12-percent per year average wage increase in the third quarter to 191,100 tenge (US\$495.40). Household incomes increased 10.7 percent in the second quarter to 579,000 tenge (US\$1,501.10).

Kazakhstan has observed growth in industrial production for the second year in a row. Chemical industry products reached 386.4 billion tenge (US\$1.00 billion) in the first ten months of 2019 and the industrial production index was 102.3 percent year-on-year (yoy). Ukraine leads all countries in importing Kazakh mineral and chemical fertilisers; the share of fertiliser exports to the country is 31.2 percent in quantitative terms and 32.2 percent in monetary terms. Kazakhstan exported more than 85,000 tonnes (19.3 percent increase yoy) of fertilisers worth in excess of \$22 million, a 12.7-percent increase yoy).

Kazakhstan mined 92.8 million tonnes of coal, lignite and concentrated coal in the first ten months of the year, 2.5 percent less than 2018. The industry had experienced growth in the previous two years. Coal and lignite production reached 289.5 billion tenge (US\$750.56 million), while the industrial production index was 97.2 percent. Coal prices by month increased most noticeably in Taldykorgan, Taraz and Turkestan. Retail prices in October averaged 12,600 tenge (US\$32.70) per one tonne, 1.2 percent higher than in September, but 4 percent lower compared to October 2018.

Investments in financial and insurance activity fixed assets totalled 60.2 billion tenge (US\$156.08 million) in the first nine months of 2019, a 38.7-percent increase year-on-year (yoy) and an all-time record indicator for the period. More than 99 percent of all capital investments, or 59.7 billion tenge (US\$154.78 million), attracted to the segment are businesses' own funds, a 39.3-percent increase yoy. Among other funding sources, bank loans grew 2.6 percent during the year to 432.8 million tenge (US\$1.12 million). Financing from other borrowed funds decreased 32.6 percent to 112.8 million tenge (US\$292,448).

## Kazakhstan, EAEU to increase control over dairy production in 2020

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh government will tighten controls over dairy production starting Jan. 1 as part of the new Eurasian Economic Union Technical Regulation on the safety of milk and dairy products.

The requirements introduce new maximum quantitative indicators of mesophilic aerobic and facultative anaerobic microorganisms and somatic cells for raw milk, skimmed milk and cream, and will control their purity, acidity, density, bacterial contamination and fat rates.

The Eurasian Economic Commission Council adopted the technical regulation in 2013 to improve the safety and quality of milk and dairy products produced for food purposes in the EAEU.

To adapt to the upgraded conditions, Kazakh authorities arranged

and gradually implemented measures to modernise and reform the local dairy industry. However, Kazakhstan postponed the introduction of new requirements twice.

"The delay was caused by objective factors. First is the underdevelopment of the raw material base – more than 70 percent of milk going to processing is produced at private farms. This milk is often of low quality due to negligence regarding sanitary and veterinary norms such as vaccination, proper balanced feeding, improvement of genetic potential," the Kazakh Ministry of Agriculture press service said.

It was previously reported that approximately 90 percent of raw milk coming to Kazakh milk plants from farmers did not meet the EAEU technical regulation standards.

To address this issue and raise the quality of the industry's raw materials, Kazakhstan's Ministry

of Agriculture is focusing on increasing the number of organised dairy farms through its farming development programme. To provide the farms with succulent feed, the authorities propose to irrigate 120,000 hectares.

In addition, Kazakhstan plans to build 244 family farms and 95 industrial dairy farms within five years.

To date, 10 family farms with a total capacity of 989 head of cattle are already in operation in the Akmola, Aktobe, Almaty, Zhambyl,

To date, 10 family farms with a total capacity of 989 head of cattle are already in operation in the Akmola, Aktobe, Almaty, Zhambyl, North Kazakhstan and Turkestan regions.

North Kazakhstan and Turkestan regions. Two more industrial farms operate in the Pavlodar and North

Kazakhstan regions. Twelve additional milk reception points were created with state support this year.

To help farmers adapt, officials are also offering to develop anchor cooperation in the dairy industry sphere and expand state support for the technical equipment and re-equipment of the dairy farms, as well as to create training farms to increase knowledge in the field of dairy goods manufacturing.

The country is also continuing with its road map on bringing

Kazakhstan's dairy products into compliance with EAEU safety requirements.

## IMF statement notes continuing economic growth

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – While Kazakhstan's economic growth remains strong, its fiscal framework, monetary and exchange policy should be strengthened, reported the International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2019 Article IV Mission Staff Concluding Statement on Nov. 13.

"Growth remains strong, fueled by supportive fiscal policy, oil and gas sector investment and retail lending. Risks to inflation have increased and the National Bank (NBK) appropriately tightened policy in September. Additional budget outlays have involved resources from the National Fund and revision to the non-oil deficit path. While medium-term fiscal consolidation is envisaged supported by improved revenue administration, there is a strong case to strengthen the fiscal framework, including fiscal rules and transparency. There is scope for strengthening the effectiveness of monetary and exchange policy as well, including enhancing NBK independence and improving monetary transmission and communications. The asset quality review now underway is an opportunity to address long-standing problems in the banking sector. The formation of a new, independent financial supervisor should be carefully managed to limit risks.

Continued implementation of business environment, governance and public administration reforms is critical for strong, sustained, inclusive growth," said the statement.

The projected trends for 2019 show economic growth and the unemployment rate remaining unchanged, at 4.1 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively. At the same time, the inflation rate is projected to increase from 5.3 percent to 5.6 percent compared with 2018 numbers. The general government finances percentage of the GDP decreased from 22.2 to 20.9.

Non-oil growth is expected to remain strong going forward, with risks on the down side.

"Rising inflationary pressures prompted an increase of the policy rate by 25 basis points to 9.25 percent. Risks remain due to persistently strong demand, supported by wage and social spending hikes and consumer lending; further action may be needed," said the statement.

Efforts should continue to strengthen the credibility of the monetary and exchange rate framework. Financial support to banks from the government and NBK has contributed to stabilising the banking sector, but the need for close monitoring continues.

"Over the past two years, several banks received significant state funds, either through the purchase of bad assets by the

Problem Loan Fund or subsidised loans from an NBK subsidiary. This led to improvement of bank capital and liquidity indicators. Corporate lending has been sluggish, although consumer loans are growing rapidly, which warrants close monitoring," said the statement.

The statement advised carefully monitoring the planned redesign of the financial supervisory architecture.

"The relocation of the NBK to Nur-Sultan and establishment of an independent Agency for Regulation and Development of Financial Markets in Almaty carries risks of reduction of supervisory capacity, which should be addressed," it added.

As for the fiscal policy and framework, a looser fiscal stance is expected for 2019, due to stepped-up social support and regional development outlays and despite strong non-oil revenues. The Kazakh government is also intending to upgrade its fiscal policy framework, including the fiscal rules system.

Progress has been made regarding governance, but further gains are needed, noted the statement.

"Kazakhstan has made several high-level commitments to improve governance and reduce corruption risks, including in the 100 Concrete Steps and the 2015-25 National Anti-Corruption Strategy," it added.

## Digital transformation has a \$578 million positive effect

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan's digital transformation has had a \$578 million positive economic effect, reported the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry press service. As a result of the changes, information and communications technology (ICT) costs have decreased 13 percent per year.

Digital transformation is one of the country's main goals. The nation adopted the Digital Kazakhstan programme in 2017 to accelerate economic development and improve people's quality of life through the use of digital technologies.

The programme is focused in five categories – digitising industries, transitioning to a digital state, implementing the Digital Silk Road, developing human capital and creating an innovative ecosystem. It has developed 17 initiatives and organised more than 100 events.

Since Digital Kazakhstan was implemented in 2018, information and communications investments have grown 40.3 percent per year to 92.5 billion tenge (US\$238.9 million).

The same year, the share of organisations using computers increased from 70.7 percent to 77.7 percent

year-on-year (yoy), reported ranking.kz. Organisations with Internet access grew from 67.7 percent to 75.1 percent in 2018 yoy; those offering Internet resources increased from 21.7 percent to 22.3 percent.

Investments decreased 10.2 percent to 46 billion tenge (US\$118.8 million) yoy in the first nine months of 2019. Investments in fixed assets has been used to replace old equipment (15 percent), expand production capacity to increase the number of subscribers (11 percent) and introduce new technologies (5 percent).

The Kazakh government has estimated introducing digital technologies will result in 2-10 percent annual productivity growth, 3 percent field production growth, 25-50 percent agricultural productivity growth and a 10-20 percent decrease in production costs, reported primeminister.kz.

According to International Data Corporation (IDC), direct investment in digital transformation from 2020-2023 will reach \$7.4 trillion. By 2023, the share of digitisation costs will increase from the current 36 percent to 50 percent of all ICT investments.

The greatest growth is forecast in data analysis and analytics, as companies create competitive advantages based on information.

# BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

The Nur-Sultan Department for Investment and Enterprise Development has devised a programme allowing large retailers to obtain soft loans in exchange for maintaining prices on certain products, reported inbusiness.kz Nov. 14. Because the mechanism is aimed at stabilising prices, interest will be 0.01 percent. Retailers using the loans would be required to preserve prices on 19 socially significant products such as milk, bread, eggs, potatoes and beef. Soft loans have been in practice since 2017, providing approximately 300 million tenge (US\$776,000) in the past two years and providing positive results, according to the department.

The Digital Kazakhstan Association and the Public Council overseeing the Ministry of Trade and Integration held a roundtable Nov. 4 about the draft law on consumer rights' protection, reported inbusiness.kz. Part of the draft law sets the priority for restoring and compensating for violated consumer rights. According to Committee for Consumer Rights Protection Deputy Chairperson Aizhan Bizhanova, administrative fines go directly to the national budget and have no effect on restoring a consumer's rights. The committee developed and improved eight key areas, including the Institute for Self-Regulation, where a consumer can register a complaint and choose a pre-trial settlement. Administrative liability will be applied in four cases – untimely return or exchange of goods, failure to reveal goods' properties, providing goods and services without relevant documentation and instances where the entrepreneur has not responded to a consumer complaint within ten days. The last case was of concern to businesspeople, who said not every type of business could process complaints within that time frame. They noted the committee did not analyse the draft law's effects on businesses.

The Information and Accounting Centre (IAC) proposed introducing BidaiCoin in April for grain purchases, reported inbusiness.kz Nov. 13. The buyer will convert tenge into BidaiCoin one to one on qoldau.kz and instantly pay the grain farmer for his product. The method is intended to secure farmers from instances when buyers do not pay or banks have money problems. The contract with qoldau.kz will be finalised only if the buyer has enough BidaiCoin and the transaction occurs immediately. IAC is waiting for the legislation to be prepared by the Agriculture and Digital Development ministries and hoping to implement the coin in the first half of 2020.

More than 70 companies from Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan received awards from National Business Rating in a ceremony in Nur-Sultan, reported inbusiness.kz Nov. 13. The awards, given to leading companies in industries such as oil and gas, agriculture, financial services, trade, construction, manufacturing, advertising and hospitality, are based on an analysis of business performance indicators, signs of financial success and reputation among customers. Uzbek Ambassador Saidikrom Niyazkhodjaev and Duslyk Ethnological Centre Deputy Chairperson and Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan member Hassan Sharipov attended the ceremony.

Kazakh businesspeople speaking at the third Young Presidents Organisation (YPO) forum Nov. 18 talked about developing business using digital technologies, reported kursiv.kz. More than 700 individuals hoping to become businesspeople attended the event. The invited speakers represented prominent Kazakh businesses such as BI Group (construction) Board Chairperson Aydin Rakhimbayev, who initiated the forum; Bilim Media Group (digital education) founder Rauan Kenzhekhanuly; Chocofamily Holding (e-commerce) co-founder Ramil Mukhoryapov and Freedom Holding Corp. (retail brokerage and investment banking) head Timur Turlov. They spoke about how their businesses grew and the way digital technologies and working online help them achieve their goals.

## Kazakh, Turkish businesses ink deals worth \$1.5 billion

By Assel Satubaldina

NUR-SULTAN – Istanbul hosted the Kazakh Turkish Business Forum Nov. 10, where companies from the two countries signed 18 documents worth \$1.5 billion to develop infrastructure, industry, transport and logistics, healthcare, public and private partnerships and the financial market.

Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin, as part of his official visit to the nation, and Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay opened the forum by welcoming more than 500 Turkish and 100 Kazakh businesses. Mamin also later met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara.

"The cooperation between our countries has seen dynamic development in all areas and there is a foundation to bring the bilateral ties to a new quality level. Kazakhstan's



L-R: Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

First President Nursultan Nazarbayev and head of state Kassym-Jomart Tokayev consider Turkey one of the key and strategic partners of Kazakhstan," said Mamin.

More than 4,200 companies with Turkish capital are registered in Kazakhstan. Bilateral trade

reached \$2.3 billion in the first nine months of the year, 68 percent more than 2018.

The sides expect trade will exceed \$3 billion this year, a significant growth from \$30 million in 1992. The current pool of investment projects is worth more than

\$6 billion. Kazakhstan and Turkey Business Council Chair Mert Sari indicated the growth was not steady and noted the need for a new trade model.

Mamin and Oktay also participated in the intergovernmental economic commission meeting which ended with signing a joint action plan. The document includes 65 trade and investment, industry, transport, education, healthcare and tourism measures, among other areas.

They also inked the intergovernmental agreement on international combined goods transportation and an action plan for the new synergy joint economic programme for 2019-2021.

The Kazakh Ministry of Trade and Integration and Turkish Ministry of Trade will cooperate in developing Halal products. The countries also agreed to begin producing corrugated cardboard pack-

aging, paint and varnish products in Kazakhstan's Aktobe-Gebze industrial zone and start infrastructure development in Turkestan.

The companies will also build university hospitals in Almaty and Karaganda, multidisciplinary hospitals in Aktau, Aktobe, Atyrau, Kokshetau, Kyzylorda and Taraz and diagnostic centres in Aktobe and Shymkent.

Mamin met with the heads of Turkey's 40 largest companies. Some have invested in Kazakhstan, while others are exploring the possibility of investing in Central Asia's largest economy. He encouraged the businesses to contribute in developing Turkestan city in southern Kazakhstan as a cultural and spiritual centre of the Turkic world.

During his visit, Mamin also laid flowers at the Ataturk Mausoleum and he and Erdoğan planted trees as part of Turkey's Breath for the Future environmental campaign.

## Kazakh-Italian business forum generates investment interest



L-R: Italian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Pasquale D'Avino and Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador-at-Large Yerlan Khairov.

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Nov. 13 Kazakh-Italian Business Forum demonstrated the interest among Italian businesspeople in investing in the Central Asian country.

"I am very happy that the Kazakh business community is very attracted by the Italian economy, by Italian businessmen and businesswomen. Today, we were so successful to have more than 100 representatives of different companies, corporations and public offices and institutions. I really believe that Kazakhstan needs Italian technology and Italian technology needs its Kazakh counterparts for the great natural resources, for the great professional talents of Kazakh businesspeople, for this time of great opportunities the Kazakh government is offering to foreign investors and partners. We believe that we have to work hand in hand to do much, much more than this. We will do another business forum with the commitment to quality and productivity," Italian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Pasquale D'Avino told The Astana Times.

The results of the forum have been realised immediately. Italian

company GSE signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate with electric utility company AREK, said Italian Embassy in Kazakhstan Attaché for Commercial and Cultural Affairs Emilio Sessa.

From 2005-2019, \$6.6 billion in Italian investments were made into the Kazakh economy and 275 joint enterprises began operation, reported the Kazakh Invest press service. Foreign trade turnover with Italy was \$6.7 billion in the first eight months of 2019.

"Kazakhstan has tremendous potential for the agribusiness. It is amazing what the country can achieve with that business. Geographically, it is located close to the biggest market in the world with a high demand for vegetable and meat proteins – that is China. We in Italy have technologies that can increase the productivity of the land with agricultural machinery. We also have the technology to keep the fruits and vegetables fresh for a long time. We have a few things that we can put together with Kazakh friends," said Italian Agency for the Promotion Abroad and the Internationalisation of Italian Companies Commissioner to Central Asia Salvatore Parano.

Historically, Italy was among the first investors in Kazakhstan. Since the beginning of diplomatic relations between the countries, the strategic oil and gas sector has been the main attraction for international investors. The Italian company Eni has been present in Kazakhstan since 1992.

"We have been here since the 1990s, so we know the country (Kazakhstan) pretty well. The company is well placed here. We are a differentiated company; we are in the construction business and infrastructure as well as oil and gas and hotels and hotel management. We are so diversified we have to follow the different news taking place in the country. Our customers are also present at this forum. So, looking at what our customers are doing is an interest for ourselves as well. We are here also to establish contacts and relationships with potential customers," said Renco Services Division Technical Director Federico Cangilioli.

Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador for Special Projects Yerlan Khairov addressed areas of potential interest to Italian investors. He noted the investment climate is very important to Kazakhstan; it is also very important that every investor that comes to the nation feels protected and comfortable and receives the help he or she needs.

Khairov spoke about the benefits of investing and working through the Astana International Finance Centre (AIFC) and Kazakh Invest. He listed several areas where Italian investment or technology could be applied, such as privatising oil and gas projects, transport, communications, agriculture, food production, logistics, mechanical engineering, public-private partnerships (PPP), field exploration, the digitisation programme and future economics.

The government is ready to help interested investors by removing customs duties on their

products. If a company invests more than \$12 million into priority industries including chemistry, oil chemistry, metallurgy, mechanical engineering or food production, the government will exempt it from paying three types of taxes – corporate (up to 10 years of zero payment), property (up to \$8 million) and land (up to \$10 million).

"I am sure that today's business forum will give impetus to the development of economies and business relations between the countries. We have great opportunities to expand trade, economic and investment cooperation," said Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Manlio Di Stefano.

During his visit, Italian businesspeople working in Kazakhstan shared their experiences, adding they found the conditions among the most comfortable for investment. This prompted the possibility of looking deeper into Kazakh investment.



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## EBRD to finance Kurty-Kapshagai highway reconstruction

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and KazAvtoZhol have signed a 34.5 billion tenge (US\$89 million) loan agreement for the Kurty-Kapshagai road project. The signing ceremony was held at the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development.

Authorities plan to use the funds to reconstruct the 67-kilometre (km) section connecting the two settlements. The road is a part of the Centre-South corridor, the major project linking the country's north and south regions.

"The Xinjiang Construction Company will be the project contractor. The contract has already been signed on the results of the tender, so we are ready to proceed

with the project," said KazAvtoZhol Chair Ulan Alipov.

EBRD is actively involved in financing Kazakh infrastructure projects. It previously provided \$322 million for two road industry projects as part of the Western Europe-Western China International Transit Corridor – the 102-km Aktobe-Martuk and Tashkent-Shymkent highways.

KazAvtoZhol has also implemented several projects. The company signed a \$196-million loan agreement for the construction and installation work is now underway on a 143-km portion of the Kurty-Burylbaytal highway.

The company also inked a 103.7 billion tenge (US\$ 268 million) loan agreement this year to renovate a 243-km section of the Atyrau-Astrakhan highway near the Russian border, including the Atyrau northern bypass.

# EDITORIAL & OPINIONS

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## First Presidents' Day celebrates Nazarbayev, people and nation

When First President's Day was celebrated across Kazakhstan last December, the country had no idea of the historic events which lay just ahead. Just more than three months later, Kazakhstan's First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev announced he was stepping down from a post he had held ever since the country gained its independence. His decision was a major moment for a country that had known no other leader since independence, a turning point which outside observers had warned was a potential threat to Kazakhstan's hard-won stability and progress.

Three decades later, Kazakhstan is not only by far the largest economy in Central Asia but is now among the top 50 developed countries in the world. Its flourishing open market economy continues to attract investment and business partners from every continent, which will provide a powerful springboard for continued growth and prosperity.

With hindsight, the announcement can be seen as another example of Nursultan Nazarbayev's sound judgement as the country sailed through what might have been a stormy time. To his list of achievements can be added the seamless and successful transition to a new democratically-elected President who, in a short period, has already demonstrated his own leadership qualities and determination to build on his predecessor's legacy.

And this legacy, seen in the quality of life of Kazakh citizens and the country's standing in the world, has been remarkable. As we have said before, Kazakhstan has come so far come under its First President's guiding hand that it is easy to forget from where the country started in 1991 and the obstacles it had to overcome.

These challenges – a landlocked country surrounded by more powerful neighbours, an ethnically diverse population which could have been a recipe for tensions and run-down industry and public services seriously starved of investment

– left many to question Kazakhstan's future. But thanks to Nazarbayev's leadership together with the hard work of the Kazakh people, such questions have long been answered.

Three decades later, Kazakhstan is not only by far the largest economy in Central Asia but is now among the top 50 developed countries in the world. Its flourishing open market economy continues to attract investment and business partners from every continent, which will provide a powerful springboard for continued growth and prosperity.

It is a record of sustained success which has been shared by the Kazakh people. Unemployment is low and the numbers in poverty have been slashed. Living standards and public services, such as health and education have been transformed. The new generation of Kazakhs on which the future rests are the best educated and most entrepreneurial in the country's history.

Under Nursultan Nazarbayev's leadership, too, what had sometimes been viewed as weaknesses have been turned into positives. Kazakhstan may be landlocked but, through major investment in modern road and rail routes, it now successfully links markets to the east and west, north and south. Our diverse population has turned out to be a strength at home and helped Kazakhstan bolster friendships across the world as well as providing an example of a tolerant, healthy society.

Kazakhstan's growing economic strength has been matched by its increased global influence and stature. The First President's staunch personal commitment to peace, dialogue and international co-operation has helped foster close relationships with neighbours and countries in every continent. Just as Kazakhstan's territory is proving an essential bridge between trading blocs so it is helping ease tensions and bring countries together. Thanks largely to Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country is seen as a force for good in the world as the historic election to the UN Security Council underlined.

For all these reasons – and many more – Kazakhstan is rightly grateful to its First President. Without his vision and tireless efforts over three decades, it is hard to believe the country would be as stable, prosperous or have such a strong voice in the world. As we said last year, the Day of the First President is a chance for all Kazakh citizens to celebrate his remarkable role and, in doing so, to reflect on the modern, successful and forward-looking country they have built together. There can hardly be a better reason for this national holiday.

## SIPRI Director: Water management must take priority in Central Asian cooperation

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Water management should be the focus of Central Asian cooperation, particularly in the face of climate change, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Director Dan Smith said Nov. 12.

"Climate change is happening and it will have a different impact on different places in the world... For countries like those in Central Asia, the issue is more like that of the Middle East, which is water management," Smith said in an exclusive interview for this story while attending the fifth annual Astana Club meeting here. "So, as rainfalls change and as glacial runoff means the annual supply of water from the glaciers and mountains declines over time, these countries are facing increasing pressures on their water supplies and that slow onset of the problem is going to build over 20 to 30 years into something that is almost unmanageable. So, I would say, if the question is what can the governments of Central Asia, what can the people of Central Asia be doing about this thing – then they have to be working together. A lot of water sources are shared. So that is the beginning point; to set up cooperative arrangements, institutions between the governments of the region that make practical solutions possible to handle the problem."

Water management, if not regulated properly, has a chance of becoming a flashpoint of tension, as it has already in Iraq, Smith pointed out.

"If you look up the fighting in Iraq over the last few years, you will see that one of the sets of strategic objectives of the so-called Islamic group – Islamic State at that period – one of them was to take control of the water supply, coming down to two rivers. So, the control of the water supply, actually going back to medieval times, has always been a tactic in war...



Dan Smith

Nowadays it can be on a much bigger scale. This is why strategic dams are important and can be important for downstream countries in particular."

Another area of international policy yet to be addressed by international cooperation mechanisms is the use of new military technologies, particularly lethal autonomous weapon systems.

A lot of water sources are shared. So that is the beginning point; to set up cooperative arrangements, institutions between the governments of the region that make practical solutions possible to handle the problem.

"I think that within the international system there are all capabilities and capacities, but they have to be activated. I will give just one example – robotics has come into the military sphere, so we now have what I call as lethal autonomous weapon systems. These are weapons that fire themselves... But the question of what control should there be of lethal autonomous weapon systems is one the

governments have not yet answered. In fact, most governments have not expressed a position on whether they should be controlled or not. Indeed, most governments don't have a definition of autonomous weapon systems that allows them to get into a discussion, that allows them to develop a position, that allows them to negotiate with others. So, the development of thinking in the government policy is lagging way behind the technology and it needs to accelerate," he explained.

As for the Central Asian region, Smith said it's better to stay out of the military technology race, to avoid provoking its neighbours.

"Well, I hope the region is able to stay out of the future military technology race, because the risks will be huge... You have two great powers: Russia on one side and China on another. And if Kazakhstan gets itself involved with military build-up and forms an alliance with one side or another, it will be seen as a challenge from one side; if it will not form an alliance with neither, it will be seen as a challenge by both. And I don't think that's the future you want," said Smith.

Overall, said Smith, growing global military budgets would be better spent addressing climate change.

"I think they reflect a distorted sense of priorities. Military spending is increasing, not by a dramatic 10 or 15 percent, but by a couple of percent each year. It stands now at \$7 trillion. There is enough of the killing power in the world to satisfy any maniac at the moment. So, couldn't we just – a few hundred billion out of that – spend on addressing the climate change problems?"

Smith was a participant in the fifth annual Astana Club forum held in the Kazakh capital Nov. 11 and 12. This year, the Astana Club gathered professionals and experts to discuss new models for cooperation in what is termed as Greater Eurasia.

## UN Women adopts action plan to localise Central Asian gender equality commitments

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Central Asian countries adopted a joint action plan to accelerate progress on gender equality targets across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a Nov. 13 expert meeting in Almaty. The plan is expected to give new impetus to inter-regional synergies to tackle gender inequalities in the region.

"I was excited to participate in this meeting. I was impressed with the Kazakh government's commitment to the sustainable development agenda. The purpose of the meeting was to convene all the various actors and see what actions we can undertake to implement the SDG agenda," UN Women for Europe and Central Asia Deputy Regional Director Blerta Cela said Nov. 15 in an exclusive interview for this story.

The plan was developed in a consultative and inclusive manner with the participation of different stakeholders not only from Kazakhstan, but also from the whole region. They identified the core priorities that need to be addressed to accelerate actions on the sustainable development agenda.

"We will be following up with



UN Women for Europe and Central Asia Deputy Regional Director Blerta Cela.

the stakeholders. They also committed that they will be further refining this action plan and looking at how each action will be implemented. Also, as part of our SDG programme that we have with the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we will continue making sure that many of these commitments are translated to actions," she said.

Cela noted Kazakhstan's progress in achieving SDGs as the country has made significant advancement at the health, education and policy levels.

"There is still much lacking in these areas, especially in women's political empowerment. It remains far from reality and far from the commitments that the

country made in the Beijing Platform for Action by being 27.4 percent in the lower house and around 10.2 percent in the Senate. The target is at least 30 percent. In this area, it's still lagging behind. If you want to gain progress in different areas of the country, women's agencies, women's voice and women's participation in decision-making roles – it is a core priority," she said.

Having women in decision-making roles benefits communities. Women adopt more policies and take more actions to assist families and societies, she noted.

Women's economic empowerment is a priority, but not only in issues related to the gender pay gap and labour force participation. There is a need to ensure women are not concentrated in the informal, lower productivity sectors.

"We've seen incredible efforts and figures in terms of women's computer literacy to be above 80 percent, which is fantastic, and also women's involvement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and entrepreneurship initiatives. Women should be able to access new technologies and upgrade their skills into the higher sectors. We need to involve women more as CEOs

because we do have evidence from Fortune 500 that when you have more women CEOs, when we have more women in leadership positions, in the private sector companies, that companies become much more productive," she noted.

Kazakhstan, as well as other countries, is experiencing many challenges related to violence against women. UN Women has been working in the area to address the issue.

Statistics and figures are staggering, said Cela. One third of all crimes are committed against women and 15 percent of women believe it's tolerable for them to be beaten by their husbands.

"We need to deal not just at the policy level, but also more with the cultural and social norms, increasing confidence in the security of women, making sure that these crimes are not acceptable," she said.

The country can't progress economically and socially when a significant part of the population is subject to violence, she posited. What actions should be taken? It is important to ensure women have all the services they need. Women should have access to justice services. Women need to feel confident that if they are

subject to violence, they can report this easily and at no cost, she explained.

"They are not going to be discriminated or victimised further. They are not going to be waiting in line for years for them to have justice. Addressing violence against women requires a multi-sectorial, holistic approach. Working with male actors is also important," she added.

UN Women is engaging a lot with a number of young people, because not only are they the future of any country, "they are at the forefront of the solution towards achieving equality," said Cela.

"We have launched a big campaign, which is called Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights for an Equal Future, which will be a defining moment for the next year. The next year coincides with the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. We will organise many events to commemorate this important document, which we consider a blueprint for gender equality," she noted.

Young people were also the highlight of the recent regional intergovernmental consultations in Geneva. Throughout 2020, UN Women will be launching events and campaigns focused on their voices.

"Globally and regionally, we are conscious of truthful youth engagement and them being at the leadership position. In Kazakhstan, we are focusing on increasing that young people join the regional and global voices so that they can say no to violence and inequality and help with changing the shifts of social norms on inequalities," she said.

In advance of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, Cela shared her message to women and girls.

"I like the beautiful Kazakh expression that women rock the cradle with one hand and they rock the world with the other hand. Women are champions. Many women live in a not equal position. They are burdened disproportionately with taking care of families and communities... yet they manage to be incredible champions. Be confident, believe in yourself, because you do rock and you are amazing. You do major achievements that we all should be proud of. The same message goes to the government – if you want to achieve your ambition to become one of the most developed countries, include women in economic, political and social spheres," she said.

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# OPINIONS

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## Now is the time to accelerate gender equality in the Asia-Pacific

By Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Great strides have been taken to empower women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted an ambitious global agenda to achieve gender equality 25 years ago. Gender parity has been achieved in primary education. Maternal mortality has been halved. Today, the region's governments are committed to overcoming the persistent challenges of discrimination, gender-based violence and women's unequal access to resources and decision-making.

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference for the Beijing+25 Review will meet in Bangkok this week to explore how more Beijing Declaration commitments can be met to improve the lives of women and girls in the region. Asia-Pacific governments have reviewed their progress and identified three priority areas where action is im-



Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

perative to accelerate progress in the coming five years.

First, we must end violence against women, such as a severe human rights violation, which continues to hinder women's empowerment. As many as one in two women in the region have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the last 12 months. Countries in the region have adopted laws and policies to prevent and respond to



Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

violence against women. This is progress on which we must build. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2015 adopted the Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and a Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 2018. Free legal services, hotlines and digital applications to report violence and emergency shelters and safe spaces for

survivors are increasingly common. New partnerships are underway challenging stigma and stereotypes, working directly with boys and men. However, more investment is needed to prevent violence, and to ensure all women and girls who experienced violence will have access to justice and essential services.

Second, women's political representation must be increased in Asia and the Pacific. Our region's representation rates are behind the global average. Only one in five parliamentarians are women in Asia-Pacific. Despite governments committing to gender parity in decision making 25 years ago in Beijing, the region has seen the share of women in parliament grow at just 2.2 percentage points annually over the past two decades. We must, therefore, look to where faster progress has been made. In several countries, quotas have helped increase the number of women in parliament. These need to be further expanded and complemented with targeted, quality training and mentoring for women leaders and

removing the barriers of negative norms, stigma and stereotypes of women in politics and as leaders.

Third, economic empowerment remains key. Only half the women in our region are in paid work, compared with 80 percent of men. Ours is the only region in the world where women's labour-force participation is decreasing in the past 10 years. Two out of three working women are in the informal sector, often with no social protection and in hazardous conditions. Legislative measures to deliver equal pay and policies to ensure the recruitment, retention and promotion of women must be part of the solution, as must supporting the transition of women from informal to formal work sectors. Digital and financial inclusion measures can empower women to unleash their entrepreneurial potential and support economic growth, jobs and poverty reduction. Action has been taken in all these areas by individual countries. They can be given scale by countries working at the regional level.

Next year will mark the convergence of the 25 years of implemen-

tation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the five-year milestone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Investments and financing for gender equality need to be fully committed and resourced to realise these ambitious targets and commitments. Our hope is that the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference for the Beijing+25 Review will help provide the necessary momentum. Now is the time to craft priority actions for change and accelerate the realisation of human rights and opportunities for all women and men, girls and boys. Let us remain ambitious in our vision, and steadfast in our determination to achieve gender equality and women empowerment in Asia and the Pacific.

**Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women.**

## Kazakhstan's economic diplomacy: on solid footing and with clear goals in mind

By Mukhtar Tileuberdi

Our country pursues a peaceful and friendly foreign policy towards all states with which it has established diplomatic relations. There are no substantive contradictions in the area of political cooperation with any of them. Moreover, we have the same or similar views on most issues of bilateral interaction and international agenda.

Kazakhstan also sets ambitious economic goals. In particular, our country plans to become one of the 30 most-developed countries in the world by 2050. Achieving such a daunting task requires intensive economic contacts with foreign countries and international organisations. Therefore, an active foreign economic policy plays a leading role in Kazakhstan's diplomacy.

This vision is consistent with international experience. One of the major trends in world diplomacy is the economisation of foreign ministries' activities, meaning strengthening the focus on economic affairs such as promoting exports and attracting investments. This is most evident in the experience of countries such as Australia, Austria, Canada, South Korea, Sweden, etc. In the case of Kazakhstan, the main subject of negotiations with foreign diplomats is usually trade and investment cooperation.

In order to successfully implement the objectives of Kazakhstan's foreign economic policy, it is necessary to meet mandatory requirements, which, in turn, are divided into internal and external.

Internal prerequisites. These include, first of all, the macroeconomic environment. It is problematic to establish strong mutually beneficial contacts with foreign partners if the country experiences certain economic difficulties. For instance, the high volatility of the national currency is a serious obstacle to the development of mutually beneficial trade and foreign investment.

The fact that there is a legal framework for economic cooperation and, most significantly, its unconditional enforcement are of paramount importance. This means the mandatory implementation of bilateral agreements on economic cooperation. We should not merely "sign," but also scrupulously observe the letter and spirit of the adopted instruments.

Minimising corruption plays a special role in this area. It is not only about fighting it, but also about creating conditions that make it unfavourable. It is these criteria that are used by a number of foreign countries that have or seek to obtain high scores on the Transparency International's scale.

External prerequisites. They are mainly reduced to the situation in international commodity, financial and credit markets; negative consequences of world crises and contradictions between leading players;

stock and price collapses. Ratings and forecasts of international agencies, as well as assessments of reputable experts, are also crucial.

Failure of the above-mentioned preconditions to fully comply with modern requirements is often conducive to problems in the implementation of foreign economic policy. In this context, both highly developed countries and emerging economies are trying to maximise the benefits of cooperation with international economic organisations and financial institutions, including rating agencies.

The world economy is now suffering from turmoil caused by trade wars between the world powers. An economic confrontation between the U.S. and China, the U.S. and Russia, the EU and Russia, Japan and Korea contributed to the revision of global economic growth forecasts from 3.6 percent to 3.1 percent. There are risks of new stock market shocks and unstable commodity exchanges, which are fraught with negative consequences for the global economy.

Kazakhstan's priorities in foreign economic policy include a number of factors that are essentially aimed at achieving the complex objectives of economic diplomacy. They are the following.

— Comprehensive support of Kazakh business abroad. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and its foreign missions have developed and introduced systems of institutional support measures. In particular, they provide comprehensive support across the entire range of mutually beneficial cooperation, including political, economic and legal aspects. Coordinated by the Foreign Ministry, Kazakhstan's diplomatic missions are addressing issues of strategic interest to Kazakhstan's business community in their receiving states.

— Promotion of non-resource export of Kazakhstan. The focus is on the implementation of agreements at the highest and high levels on the development of trade and economic cooperation with foreign countries.

After the creation of a line ministry (the Ministry of Trade and International Relations, or MTI), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its foreign missions, remains active in arranging expert negotiations, searching for business partners, establishing long-term contacts and monitoring the implementation of priority projects. It monitors foreign markets of goods and services and analyses the ways of increasing Kazakhstan's non-resource export and the list of promising foreign countries for establishing trade missions and developing export there.

In this regard, our country is interested in the cooperation with China, the U.A.E., Iran, Vietnam, the countries of Central Asia (export of agricultural and livestock products), European Union (EU) countries (export of chemical and metallurgical products), as well as collaboration



within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

One of the priority tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the field of export remains the promotion of the defence industry of Kazakhstan to foreign markets. In general, work in this direction is focused on the implementation of memoranda, roadmaps and joint activities with the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, KazakhExport, Kazakhstan Industry and Export Centre and other government bodies of Kazakhstan. Thus, active preparations are underway for the sixth international exhibition of armaments and technologies KADDEX-2020, which will be held May 28-31 in Nur-Sultan.

In general, all measures to support exporters will be undertaken through the one-stop-shop represented by QazTrade. This work will coordinate the state policy of promoting Kazakh exports. It is important to ensure proper interaction between the main actors of the foreign economic policy of Kazakhstan in practice (MFA-Kazakhstan-MTI-Qaztrade).

At present, our cooperation with MTI is also being conducted within the framework of opening 11 trade missions of Kazakhstan abroad, including in priority sales markets of Russia, China and Central Asian countries. Special attention is paid to the promotion of Kazakh brands on the target markets.

One of the primary tasks of our foreign economic policy is attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to achieve the goals of diversifying the country's economy, developing innovative technologies in priority sectors, maximising the participation of foreign investors in the privatisation process, creating new jobs and addressing socio-economic issues.

The attraction of FDI is one of the most competitive fields in the world market. At the same time, further building a comprehensive three-tier ecosystem for attracting investments, expanding the list of priority countries in order to open foreign trade missions of Kazakhstan and using the experience of foreign independent partners can serve as tools for attracting FDI. In this context, in line with the instructions of the leadership of the country, special attention is paid to increasing investment cooperation with the United States, Japan and Germany.

Multilateral cooperation in the transport and logistics sphere by enhancing the transit potential of Kazakhstan, forming alternative routes, strengthening the legal framework, informing foreign partners about the possibilities of Kazakhstan remains an important factor in promoting the foreign economic interests of our country. This point has gained particular importance in the light of efforts to combine the new economic policy of Nurly Zhol and the China's Belt and Road Initiative.

In order to promote the transit and transport potential of Kazakhstan, work is on-going to monitor and analyse risks in this area, including the full functioning of existing and the launch of new cargo transportation routes. There is a practice of conducting targeted events in the most priority countries with the presentation of transit and transport capabilities of Kazakhstan. Currently, cooperation with international organisations in the field of transport has been intensified within the framework of international transport corridors (Organisation for Cooperation of Railways, TRACECA, etc.).

In order to diversify and modernise the economy, it is necessary to deeply study and attract international best practices in economic sphere. This applies primarily to the development of the non-commodity sector of the economy, attracting FDI in the processing industry, the introduction of innovative technologies, the development and effective use of special economic zones. In this context, the experience of Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, as well as the EU countries that do not have a sufficient raw material base but have achieved high indicators in building a smart economy, is of great interest to our country.

According to the forecasts of some researchers and leading analytical publications, the planet's hydrocarbon resources will be practically depleted by 2050. This means that the global economy will gradually "switch" to new alternative energy sources. In this regard, many countries of the world are already actively developing renewable energy technologies to achieve the maximum indicator of renewable energy production in the overall energy balance. This also applies to the development and use of environmental technologies, which are closely interlinked and governed by obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Currently, Kazakhstan has created a solid institutional network designed to strengthen and expand bilateral trade and economic cooperation at the state level. There are 133 structures, including 60 intergovernmental commissions, 22 sub-commissions and more than 50 working groups for cooperation with foreign countries in a number of industry areas. The business community of Kazakhstan has established business

councils with more than 20 countries. These platforms are an effective mechanism for the interaction of Kazakhstan with foreign partners.

The enhancement of cooperation of Kazakhstan with international economic organisations and financial institutions remains an important and determining factor in the foreign economic policy of our state.

In this context, it should be noted that there is constructive interaction between Kazakhstan and the OECD, WEF, WTO, international financial institutions (World Bank Group, IMF, EBRD, ADB, CAREC), international energy organisations (Energy Charter Treaty, International Energy Forum, OPEC, GECF, World Petroleum Council, International Energy Agency, etc.).

With the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan is actively participating in multilateral economic cooperation, especially in cooperation with international financial organisations, where the interests of our country are represented. This content is of particular importance in connection with the upcoming participation of our country's leadership in the World Economic Forum in Davos (WEF) in January 2020.

Overall, the Foreign Ministry provides the necessary assistance to the state bodies of Kazakhstan in cooperation with the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Almost all of these organisations have representative offices in our country. We are welcoming the opening of the IMF Regional Technical Support Centre for the countries of Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Mongolia in Almaty in the near future.

Prior to the formal initiation of the procedure for Kazakhstan's accession to the OECD, high-quality homework should be carried out in all areas of concern. The interaction with the structural units of the organisation is enhancing. Currently, Kazakhstan is participating in 34 working bodies of the OECD. Such a gradual approach will provide us with stronger and more convincing positions for the accession negotiations.

The Foreign Ministry's work on increasing the participation in the OECD is primarily aimed at improving the perception of the country's image in the global community. Kazakh missions in the OECD member states are being actively involved in the outreach with the receiving countries, as well as with the organisation's relevant committees, providing positive assessments from trustworthy resources. To increase the interest of the OECD member states, Kazakhstan should more openly share its experience, both positive and unresolved.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is carrying out active work within the framework of cooperation with the

WTO. On July 24, 2018, during the meeting of the WTO General Council, an application of Kazakhstan for hosting the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC-12) in Nur-Sultan was approved. For the first time the WTO Ministerial Conference will be held in the country that joined the WTO after its founding in 1995, and for the first time it will be held in the Central Asian region. Trade ministers from 164 member countries and 20 WTO observer countries will take part in the work of MC-12. Meanwhile, visits of the heads of at least 20 foreign countries are possible. The total number of participants in the event will exceed 8,000 people.

The foreign ministry works closely with leading international rating agencies (Fitch Ratings, Moody's, Standard & Poor's). In this regard, along with constant monitoring of current ratings, our ministry has established work through its missions to provide relevant information on the current socio-economic development of the country for its appropriate reflection in the ratings. However, there is an urgent need to establish constructive cooperation with European and Asian rating agencies in order to ensure balanced assessments.

For several years, Kazakhstan has been conducting a focused work on the formation of its own system of official development assistance (ODA). Namely, in Kazakhstan, the Law "On Official Development Assistance" and a number of regulatory legal acts have been adopted, human resources have been formed, and cooperation with donor organisations is developing.

Currently, the work on creating a national operator in the ODA field in a form of the KazAID Agency continues. The issue of institutionalising KazAID is still unresolved, which is associated with a number of objective circumstances. Nonetheless, Kazakhstan began to implement the first projects under the auspices of the national ODA system in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and other donors.

Improving the legal framework of economic cooperation with foreign countries remains an important component of successful implementation of the foreign economic policy of our state. Currently, a number of treaties and agreements need to be amended. In this regard, we are carefully studying the existing legal framework of economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and various countries with a view to its possible improvement.

In general, foreign economic indicators are laid down as the determinants in the entire spectrum of activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The foreign ministry acts as an important link between domestic business and external partners in promoting economic diplomacy, attracting foreign investment, supporting domestic exports, interacting with international institutions of economics and finance, increasing tourist attractiveness, analysing and forecasting the global economy. We will continue and enhance this multifaceted work.

**The author is Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.**

# BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## PetroKazakhstan commits to employ health and safety, environmental protection

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – PetroKazakhstan Oil Products (PKOP) reaffirmed its commitment to the safety and health of its employees as well as to protecting the environment, putting these outcomes among its top goals in a conversation with The Astana Times. The company shared its efforts and achievements in these fields.

Environmental issues are concerning the world more and more each day. Big companies across the globe are trying to minimise their footprints, and PKOP is not falling behind. The company spends more than \$2.6 million on environment-related events every year.

The company has implemented many projects as a part of its Modernisation Programme. In December that year, they commissioned a new, 4,000-tonne-per-year sulphur production unit to recycle acid gases. The unit, while keeping sulphur purity at 99.9 percent mass, was able to decrease sulphur dioxide emissions by 21 percent.

A spot loading unit for light petroleum products, commissioned in 2017, reduced hydrocarbon emissions during loading and reduced their share of volatile hydrocarbons by 7 percent. In the same year they launched an Isomerisation unit to produce K4 and K5 standard fuel. This was an im-



portant step for Kazakhstan ecology overall, because K4 and K5 standard fuels significantly reduce sulphur anhydride emissions.

A treatment works upgrade improved industrial wastewater treatment efficiency from 76 to 97 percent, and ensuring its equipment was tightly sealed reduced emissions into the atmosphere to 32 percent. Several projects have

helped not only decrease water consumption, but also return some used water into fire-fighting systems. This saves 30 percent of the fresh water resources previously used for fire extinguishing. The company has reduced water consumption by 9 to 12 percent depending on the locale.

Another resource the safety of which PetroKazakhstan cares about

is its employees. PKOP ensures safety by systematically teaching every employee safety basics, including that occupational safety is the foundation of every job, and that safety should be everyone's primary goal. Every employee of the company, from workers to department directors, is undergoing occupational safety monitoring.

Every six months, PKOP holds a

Safety Day, during which the vice president and the rest plan how to implement health and safety measures. The company gives refinery employees bottled drinking water, dairy products (such as milk, kefir and fermented milk) and special meals to strengthen their health. For safe movement around the refinery, PKOP installed illuminated road signs, safety signs and information boards. It also introduced cycle lanes and provided bicycles for employee use. Electric cars transport employees between refinery divisions.

PetroKazakhstan demands high safety requirements from contractors working on the refinery site as well. Before starting, they need to provide safety and labour protection compliance documentation.

The refinery implemented a corporate rewards programme for employees who report potentially dangerous situations. The programme's aim is to create a correct attitude to safety, improve awareness and instil safe behavioural skills to identify risks and prevent accidents at the work place. As a part of its Aman project, the company held an art competition among employees' children, called "A safe parent – a happy child!"

The company has received prizes for its work on worker safety and environmental protection. In 2016, First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, awarded PKOP the Paryz ecology prize for winning the country's annual business social responsibility competition. In April, the company took first place in the Exemplary Safe Enterprise category among Shymkent enterprises. National Company KazMunayGaz CEO Forums have recognised the company's high level of safety with a number of certificates, including "20 years without a death."



## QazTrade to launch website supporting exporter

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – QazTrade will launch export.gov.kz in December, a website providing a wide range of services for local and foreign businesspeople, reported primeminister.kz.

The QazTrade centre operates on the one window principle, serving as the platform where entrepreneurs can interact with institutions

such as Kazakh Invest. To broaden its functions, officials are expanding access to its services.

The website will support enterprises by providing procedures such as an independent assessment of their export potential and products and analysis of a potential importer's market and product promotional campaign, as well as assistance in preparing documents for goods and services export and a com-

prehensive analysis of foreign industry and markets, said QazTrade Trade Policy Development Centre Deputy Chair Assel Egemberdiyeva.

The website will contain all the necessary data for exporters, including information on commodities of interest to Kazakh exporters, the most attractive sales markets, statistics, advertisements and other content related to export activities. It will also help evaluate

trade barriers and develop proposals to eliminate them.

In addition, the developers plan to post an inventory of Kazakh exporters-suppliers and their output to enable foreign customers to easily find their Kazakh counterparts.

"This will be a resource for feedback from exporters where they can apply for support measures. The website will also be interesting for importers of Kazakh prod-

ucts seeking potential exporters or domestic goods suppliers," said Egemberdiyeva.

Kazakhstan's foreign trade was \$70.4 billion in the first six months of the year, 1.5 percent higher than for the same period in 2018, according to the Ministry of Trade and Integration. Total exports for the period were \$42.7 billion

The main consumers of Kazakh processed goods are China (24.8 percent), Russia (18.8 percent),

Uzbekistan (6.3 percent), the Netherlands (5.8 percent) and Turkey (4.4 percent). They consume approximately 60 percent of processed goods made in the country.

Kazakhstan's main export growth stems from Canada, China, France, Indonesia and Uzbekistan. The nation has been shipping certain new goods, such as windmills, railway and tram cars, freight wagons, radiators and their cast iron parts.

## Digital Bridge start-up competition judges impressed with Kazakh start-up ecosystem

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Although they face financial challenges, the future of Kazakh start-ups is bright, noted judges at the Digital Bridge start-up competition. The panel included Angel Labs investor accelerator Founder Tugce Ergul and ACME Capital Principal Alex Fayette.

"Kazakhstan's tech is still maturing, but it is much better than it was three or four years ago. Newer communities of people are being formed and the young Kazakh population is extremely entrepreneurial. However, I think for most of the start-ups, the challenges which are faced are primarily related to the financial aspect and the lack of a strong investor community. To carry on a start-up in the long run and scale it up, it is quite essential to find the right investors and mentors and have customers who keep coming back," said Ergul.

At the same time, the current level of involvement and interest is impressive.

"I will be the first to admit to not being deeply familiar with the current state of innovation-culture in Kazakhstan, so it was incredibly exciting to see the level of engagement and activity both from the Kazakh start-up ecosystem as well as from the government and corporate partners," said Fayette.

The increasing activity among Kazakh start-ups, many of which were previously undiscovered, attracted ACME Capital's attention. "While we at ACME Capital



L-R: ACME Capital Principal Alex Fayette and Angel Labs investor accelerator Founder Tugce Ergul.

deploy much of our investment capital within the USA, we remain very open-minded to opportunities globally. Kazakhstan is an emerging investment market that

remains under the radar for much of the global VC (venture capital) community and I was particularly excited to learn about the new developments here," he added.

Ergul has also been paying attention to the Central Asian market, waiting for ecosystems such as those supported by Astana Hub to start entering the market.

"We have been looking at entering Central Asia for the last five or six years and started conversations with Kazakh officials a few years ago. We needed the ecosystem to be at a certain place to be able to come and work on the ground and this year has felt like the right time. We met the great folks behind Astana Hub and some governmental institutions and we are in talks with them to strategise on how we can work together to foster innovation and build a more inclusive ecosystem," she said.

What she found particularly interesting is the country's recent green path.

"It is very exciting to see Kazakhstan on a greener trajectory more focused on technological advancement and less reliant on the country's oil and gas reserves. The push from the government to become forerunners in digital economy is getting great feedback from the local entrepreneurs, which has also facilitated the development of an active local tech and innovation ecosystem," she added.

While the Kazakh start-up network has started to emerge, the idea of corporate venture capital is still largely absent from, yet definitely needed by, the market.

"I think the initial step that we need to see take place in Kazakhstan is the idea of corporate venture capital (CVC). The concept of CVC currently does not exist in the country and we need big corpora-

tions and conglomerates to start investing in technology and innovation in order not to stay behind the curve. I currently work with CVCs in different industries like media, oil and mining, hospitality, travel or tech and enjoy the way that big corporations can add substantial value, industry expertise and validation to young companies who are disrupting their industries and fixing problems that the big guys are not able to on their own," said Ergul.

Fayette suggested Kazakh start-ups should prioritise their skills and concentrate on larger problems.

"I think there are two main lessons that have been learned from the most successful start-ups coming from emerging innovation ecosystems. The first is to play to your strengths. If a nation were land-locked, it might not necessarily have much of an advantage in starting companies in the shipping space. Building a start-up is hard enough, so founders should focus on where they already have some sort of unique edge or insight. Kazakh founders should reflect deeply on where their own personal talents and national capabilities can best enable innovation in a differentiated way to other countries. Second, focus on a problem much larger than Kazakhstan. Find a problem to tackle that will help people and businesses in Kazakhstan, but that can also be transformative solutions for other countries as well," he said.

Drawing from his personal cor-

porate experience, Fayette noted start-up teams need to centre on their competitive edge to attract investments.

"There are some obvious areas, like market-size and quality of team, but most frequently, our decisions come down to long-term defensibility. Very few businesses have any real defensibility to their technologies or business models. We at ACME get most excited when we talk to a founder who is architecting a business that can successfully compete both with the incumbents in a market and also win against new competitors that will inevitably try to copy their success," he added.

Regarding her current plans, Ergul hopes to work closer with Kazakh corporations and investors, as well as the government.

"Currently, our plans are twofold. We hope to work with Kazakh corporations and investors that are interested in getting involved with venture capital, but also with the Kazakh government to put the country on the digital innovation map globally," she said.

Given Kazakhstan's resources and state support provided to entrepreneurs, the country's start-up future looks very exciting, she noted.

"With an abundance of oil wealth and a government that has so strongly provided its support behind improving Kazakhstan's status as an international technological player, the future looks very exciting for young companies and entrepreneurs in the country," she added.

# Nation&Capital

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

**PEOPLE**

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**B3**

**SPORTS**

**AVANGAR defeats Syman Gaming cyber athletes at WESG Central Asia, both qualify for WESG Asia**

**B7**

## UNICEF analysis finds progress in child mortality, education, gaps in inclusion, nutrition



UNICEF Representative in Kazakhstan Arthur van Diesen and children from high schools at the presentation on Nov.19 in Nur-Sultan.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) presented its analysis of the situation of Kazakhstan’s children Nov. 19 in Nur-Sultan.

The analysis observes the country’s achievements, including progress in reducing child and maternal mortality; increasing enrolment in education, including preschool; and creating conditions for inclusive education. It also reveals gaps and issues that require special attention.

“Today is a special day for us because we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan’s ratifying this convention. On this day we are launching an analysis on the situation of children in Kazakhstan, in which we recognise progress Kazakhstan has made in terms of protecting the rights of children.

We also highlight the work that remains to be done. On the side of the achievements we highlight, for example, the fact that infant and under-five mortality has reduced greatly since independence,” said UNICEF representative in Kazakhstan Arthur van Diesen.

Continued on Page B2

## International composers contest discovers young talents

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh capital drew 115 composers under 35 years old from 24 countries to compete in the first New Music Generation international composers’ competition in Zhambyl Zhabayev Hall at the Kazakh National University of Arts Nov. 15 to 19, according to the university.

“Any competition of composers is a huge event in the world of art,” New Music Generation Artistic Director Rakhat-Bi Abdysagyn told Kazakh TV. “Our competition is a landmark event not only within our country, but also for the entire cultural community of the world.”

Abdysagyn was among the judges of the competition. The panel of judges comprised hon-

oured artists from Russia, Ukraine, France and Greece.

The contestants participated online and presented more than 210 musical scores. The scores were then made anonymous for judging.

“The submitted works were of a very high level. It is possible to say that, at the moment, considering the competition’s scale, the quality and the quantity of the works, the competition is one of the biggest and the most prestigious in the world,” Abdysagyn said in an interview for this story.

“I believe that this put the Kazakh National University of Arts and the city of Nur-Sultan on the map of international competitions, because it is one of the first major high-level events,” said jury member Martin Loridan.

Continued on Page B3

## Air Astana to launch flights between Almaty and Paris

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Air Astana will launch direct flights between Almaty and Paris in June, the company announced Nov. 25.

Air Astana will use the Airbus A321LR long-distance carriage for this flight, the first time that model will be used in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Air Astana noted.

“Flights will operate on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, departing from Almaty at 14:15 and arriving in Paris at 18:00 local time. Departure from Paris at 19:20 and arrival in Almaty the next day at 06:35 local time. The total flight time will be seven hours, 15 minutes and seven hours and 45 minutes on the way back,” said the announcement.

Tickets are already available. The cost of a round-trip flight will start from 191,000 tenge (US\$493) in economy class and from 944,000 (US\$2,438) tenge in business class.

Direct flights from the Kazakh capital, Nur-Sultan, to Paris began in 2015 and run three times per week.

Air Astana signed a letter of intent to purchase 30 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft at the Dubai Airshow Nov. 19 as part of efforts to expand its short-haul network. The list price for the order is \$3.6 billion, reports simpleflying.com.

Peter Foster, president and chief

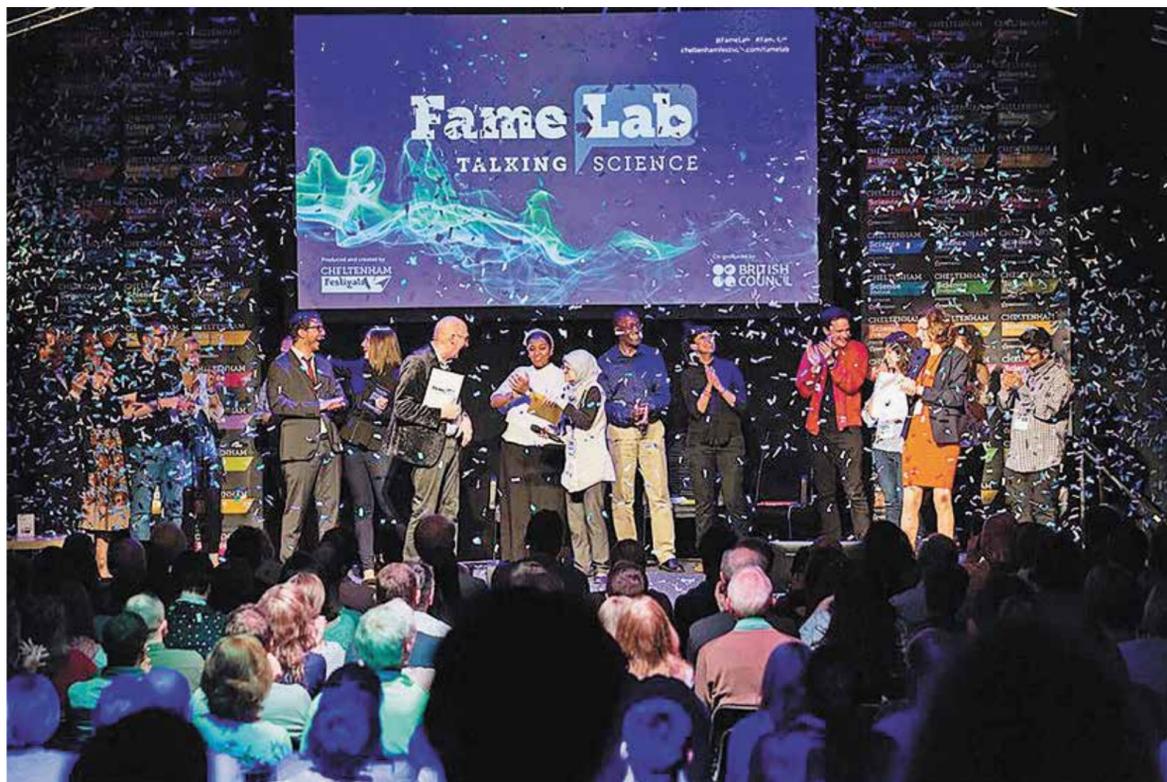
executive of Air Astana, told rusa-viainsider.com that the company emphasises maintaining a multinational team.

“I think that the reason for Air Astana’s success lies in an extremely effective management team. We have a genuinely multinational team that has been in place for many years. This team is permanent and includes people with so much experience from so many countries. Different cultures and experiences complement and contribute to the development of the airline. This, I think, is the key to our success,” he said.

Foster also said that what differentiated his experience working for Air Astana from his other work was the Kazakhs’ attitude towards decision-making, which is slower and more deliberate than what he encountered in Europe.

“I have learned a lot from working in Kazakhstan for over 14 years, starting from a management culture that is significantly different from the Western one. Here decisions are not made hastily, but more carefully than in Europe. When I graduated from the university and entered the airline industry in 1982, it was inconceivable that I might end up running an airline in what was obviously then in the Soviet Union. The experience has opened my eyes in terms of culture, history and customs, all of which continue to fascinate me,” said Foster.

## FameLab Kazakhstan accepts applications from talented science enthusiasts



By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – FameLab Kazakhstan is looking for smart, creative and charismatic individuals who can explain seemingly complex scientific concepts in a clear and easy way in just three minutes. The national winner will represent the country at the FameLab International Final in the United Kingdom in June and be a step closer to global opportunities in science communication.

Cheltenham Science Festivals organised FameLab in 2005. The partnership with the British Council in 2007 made FameLab an international competition with participants from nearly 30 countries including Australia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Germany, Greece and Kazakhstan.

Applicants should be age 21-40 and participants should engage a live audience with his or her content and delivery.

FameLab is a chance to explore new, more fascinating ways to look at science. Many participants and alumni note FameLab had a big influence on their lives and was an interesting experience.

“I think that FameLab is important because it lets one stretch one’s own boundaries, learn how to speak in front of an audience and make the talk not only clear, but interesting to listen to! FameLab also builds a network of scientists in Kazakhstan, because even though the competition is over, we, the finalists, are still in touch with each other,” said 2019 alumna Salima Davlidova.

FameLab Kazakhstan also has generous prizes for its winners.

The best science communicator is awarded 750,000 tenge (US\$1,926), while second and third place each receive 350,000 tenge (US\$898).

“I gained many important insights when I was preparing for the FameLab Kazakhstan final. After my first not very successful speech, I decided to improve and applied again the following year and I succeeded! It was very rewarding, both psychologically and financially. Moreover, this event is a great place for networking, where participants are lucky to meet some wonderful, ambitious people in the area of science and communication. Finally, one of the best experiences I gained by being a FameLab alumni was hosting the FameLab final last year!” said Tomiris Atazhanova, who participated in the event in 2017 and 2018.

To date, more than 10,000 scientists and engineers have been part of the contest.

“This is a really amazing competition for making international links. As the world moves forward, we are seeing that our problems are becoming more global, so our solutions need to become more global. Engaging people in environmental science has never been more important – thank you to FameLab for helping me learn how to do it,” said 2019 international winner Tim Gordon, reported the British Council press service.

The council organises FameLab in Kazakhstan in partnership with Chevron Kazakhstan, the Kazakh National Science Fund and OYLA Magazine. FameLab Kazakhstan will accept applications until Jan. 11. For more information, one can contact famelab@oyla.yx.

**THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO**

**ASTANA ARENA**

**Nov. 28 at 9.50 p.m.** FC Astana - Manchester United F.C., Europa League

**ASTANA OPERA**

**Nov. 28 at 7 p.m.** Musica d'accordo Astana, concert

**Nov. 29 at 7 p.m.** Prince Igor, opera

**Dec. 1 at 5 p.m.** Raymonda, ballet

**Dec. 6 at 7 p.m.** Turandot, opera

**Dec. 11 at 7 p.m.** The 250th Anniversary of Beethoven, concert

**RADISSON HOTEL ASTANA**

**Dec. 1 at 11 a.m.** ASA Charity Bazaar

**BARYS ARENA**

**Dec. 1 at 4.30 p.m.** HC Barys – HC Dinamo Minsk

**Dec. 4 at 7.30 p.m.** HC Barys – HC Jokerit Helsinki

**ASTANA BALLET**

**Dec. 1 at 6 p.m.** The Heritage of the Great Steppe

**SARYARKA VELODROME**

**Dec. 7 at 3 p.m.** BC Astana - BC Nizhny Novgorod

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

# Bashkir Ethno-Cultural Centre promotes Bashkir culture



L-R: The centre's guest, Azamat Ryskildin, Kaniyet Arykova (participant of the Youth Forum from Kyrgyzstan), Ural Aznabayev, Azamat Bairasom (speaker at the Youth Forum from Bashkortostan) and Zakir Bikmukhametov.



An artist from Bashkortostan Sibai philharmonic society performing on Yiyin celebration.

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Akbuzat Bashkir Ethno-Cultural Centre in the capital, though relatively new, is active and motivated to promote its culture and traditions, especially among the youth. In an exclusive interview with The Astana Times, Chairperson Ural Aznabayev talked about the centre's events and activities and how they attract the younger generation.

Although just three years old, Akbuzat has become part of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan and moved in July to Friendship House, where similar centres are located. It works hard to promote its culture and distinguish itself.

Akbuzat is a leader among Bashkirs. The Kazakh delegation of Bashkirs was the biggest at the International Bashkir Kurultai

(big gathering) this year in Ufa, Bashkortostan, Russia.

"The delegation from Kazakhstan, with 13 members, was the biggest among foreign delegations. Eight of them were from Akbuzat. I insisted on sending activists from our centre to motivate them, because we have only been working for two years and we need to carry on. The Kurultai appreciated our centre as the most active centre among the ones in foreign countries. No one outside Bashkortostan works like we do," said Aznabayev.

While Bashkirs are often included in the Tatar-Bashkir Centre, Akbuzat is the second purely Bashkir centre in the country. The first, founded in Aktau in 1990, will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year. The initial chairperson was Aznabayev's father.

To differentiate themselves from Tatars, the Bashkir centre created

its own brand – the Yiyin (gathering) celebration. The inaugural Yiyin was organised this year on the 100th anniversary of Bashkortostan and 35 invited singers and dancers performed in Zhetisu Park. It has been held twice and the centre hopes to make it annual. The event went international this year, as Bashkirs from Altai region, Moscow and Ufa attended and the organisers hope more will participate in 2020.

Since 2017, the centre has organised a Day of Bashkir Culture, usually held close to the Oct. 11 Bashkortostan National Day. This year's event included kurai (flute), kobyz (violin) and dance master classes and a choreographer and multi-instrument player from Bashkortostan.

"We invited young professionals on purpose this year, because it is the youth year in Kazakhstan. We want to interest our youth by the

example of young, not old," said Aznabayev.

The key is to create a bond among the generations.

"There is a young generation, an older generation, but the one in the middle is not so involved. The most important thing is to provide the connection between generations," said Azamat Ryskildin from Almaty branch.

In the future, Akbuzat would like to participate in the Youth Forum in Bashkortostan. Next year, they want to send children to Bashkir summer camp, so they can enjoy the atmosphere and soak up some language and tradition. Aznabayev acknowledges he was able to maintain his language skills only by living in a village of Bashkirs and he wants the same for the children.

Zakir Bikmukhametov, a Bashkir and Deputy Chairperson of the Friendship House Youth Division, is responsible for finding

and inviting youth of different nationalities, including Bashkirs, to the centre. Bikmukhametov's generation, said Aznabayev, is losing its language due to assimilation, which is why they are trying to attract as many young people as possible and offer master classes and language courses.

The centre teaches Bashkir classes every Sunday, where capital residents can learn from teachers in Bashkortostan using video chat. The classes are made possible with the help of the Bashkortostan Ministry of Education and to date, 20 adults and three children have attended.

Next year, the centre is planning to open classes in Friendship House. Bashkirs from Moscow, who have developed a methodology for teaching the language to small children, will train others who will later teach youngsters.

A Kazakh native developed an

app this year to teach children his language, then Ingush, Kirgiz and Bashkir. When he came to the centre for help with translations and pronunciations, members put him in touch with the Bashkir Language Preservation Fund. The app is expected to launch soon and the centre would like to present it Dec.14, the Day of Bashkir Language.

"What is the most amazing and of which I am proud is that a Kazakh contributed to the development of Bashkir language. It means a lot to us," said Aznabayev.

The centre also coordinated a Bashkir Dramatic Theatre performance in Almaty and traditional archery master class, the latter sparking individuals to develop sufficient skills to participate in an archery competition. One school has agreed to open a space where the centre will teach archery to children.

# UNICEF analysis finds progress...

Continued from Page B1

Almost every child also now has a place in primary school and preschool education has also expanded dramatically.

"But there are challenges ahead as well," noted Diesen. "There's still ways to go to make Kazakhstan truly inclusive society. When we look at children with disabilities, it is still difficult for them to fully realise their rights and to have a fulfilling role in society that starts even with education. We still see, even though more and more schools are accessible, that not every child can find a place in a regular school to study and prepare for adult life."

Nutrition is also a problem. Kazakhstan is facing what has been dubbed the double burden of malnutrition – when undernutrition exists at the same time as a growing number of young people are observed to be overweight, and micronutrient deficiencies, such as iron deficiency, are also observed.

UNICEF plans to conduct a study of obesity among children in 2020. If the current trend toward obesity is not altered, children born in 2050 may have shorter lives than children born today. Obesity could become one of the two main causes of mortality.

"It will be conducted in 170 schools among children from eight to 10. The study will be conducted jointly with UNICEF, [the World Health Organisation] WHO and the National Centre for Public Healthcare. It is the second round of the study, which is carried out every five years. Anthropometric studies will be used to measure children. Parents, teachers and school management will also be interviewed," said UNICEF Kazakhstan Health and Nutrition Programme Coordinator Kanat Sukhanberdiyev.

The situation analysis is the first step in developing a country programme with the Kazakh government for 2021 to 2025. The analysis presents the government with UNICEF's priorities for the coming years.

The country has maintained consistent levels of investment in the health, education and social sectors but they are lower than the averages for member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The infant mortality rate or the number of deaths of children under one year of age decreased from 45 to nine per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2017, according to the analysis. The maternal mortality rate has fallen dramatically from 92 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 14 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018.

"Many parents do not know how to prevent health problems caused by poor hygiene or malnutrition that increase the risk of child morbidity and mortality. Home visiting nurses tend to focus on medical problems and lack skills to identify social risks and needs and take children's and families' individual characteristics into account," reads the report.

Mother-to-child transmission of HIV was practically eliminated. Injury remains a leading cause of death and hospitalisation among children. In 2017, 4,189 children sustained injuries due to road accidents and 193 children died.

The number of children living in poverty has fallen dramatically since 2000. Some 15.6 percent of children live in households in the lowest income decile and inequality among regions in terms of child poverty is significant.

Death by suicide remains one of

the leading causes of adolescent mortality in the country. Mental health disorders and challenges including depression and anxiety are linked to suicidal behaviour.

UNICEF also provides a list of recommendations to address the challenges. They include ensur-

ing data quality and availability for effective policy development, monitoring and evaluation measures, and improving legislation and cross-sectoral coordination and management mechanisms.

The analysis was based on a comprehensive review of existing

data and studies on children and women in the areas of health, nutrition, education, HIV, water and sanitation, the environment, child protection and social protection and participation in public life using state and international sources and statistics. Focus group dis-

cussions, semi-structured interviews and consultations with government officials, field visits and personal stories were used as sources.

Children from high schools spoke about preschool education, inclusion, nutrition, polluted air and participation in public life at the presentation. They expressed hope that their concerns can be heard to improve issues related to their lives and future.

**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>

# CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

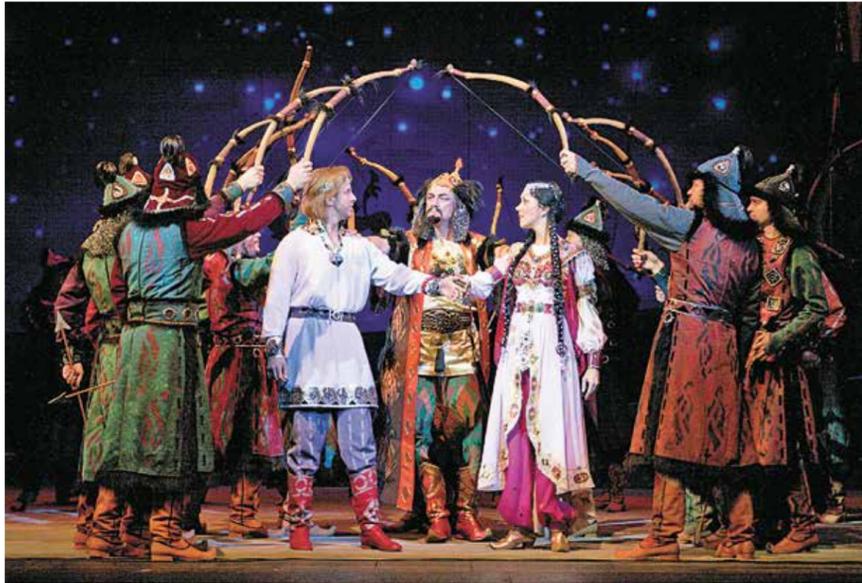
## Hvorostovsky Krasnoyarsk Theatre to perform for first time in Kazakhstan

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

**NUR-SULTAN** – The Hvorostovsky Krasnoyarsk State Opera and Ballet Theatre will present Alexander Borodin's opera "Prince Igor" Nov. 29 and Alexander Glazunov's ballet "Raymonda" Dec. 1 at the Astana Opera House, reported the theatre press service.

"Borodin's monumental classical opera 'Prince Igor' is a major production for the Krasnoyarsk Opera and Ballet Theatre. The theatre opened its first season with the premiere of this opera. After many years, the opera remains popular with the audience and is one of the main productions of the theatre. The opera was staged for the first time Aug. 12, 1978 on the day of the 350th anniversary of Krasnoyarsk. This opera's version premiered in June 2013 and was dedicated to the 35th anniversary of the theatre," it added.

The opera is a large-scale



A scene from "Prince Igor" opera.

production with a huge number of soloists. It features diverse choral scenes and ballet performances, including the Polovtsian Dances and "Fly Away on the Wings of the Wind" performed by the choir.

Borodin worked on the opera for 18 years, yet didn't finish it. After his death, Glazunov completed his teacher's work. The libretto, written by Borodin and Vladimir Stasov, is based on the epic poem "The Tale of Igor's Campaign."

"Raymonda," choreographed by People's Artist of Soviet Union and Honoured Worker of Kazakhstan Yuri Grigorovich, is based on a medieval legend about a girl waiting for her beloved's return from battle. He creates the atmosphere with the help of classical dance moves and Spanish-Arabic and Hungarian motifs as part of the complex production.

The ballet tells the story of a young girl who received two marriage proposals in one day from

Jean de Brienne, the son of a Hungarian knight, and Saracen knight Abderakhman. She accepts de Brienne's proposal who then goes on a long campaign. Raymonda dreams she is in the fairy tale garden with her beloved, when de Brienne suddenly disappears and Abderakhman appears. She awakens up to learn her nightmare has become a reality. Abderakhman is trying to kidnap her, but de Brienne arrives and kills him.

The ballet is based on Marius Petipa's choreography, with Anatoly Chepurnoy as musical director and conductor. The ballet premiered at the Krasnoyarsk Theatre Nov. 7, 2018.

The Astana Opera House performed Pyotr Tchaikovsky's opera "Eugene Onegin" at the Krasnoyarsk Opera and Ballet Theatre Oct. 23 and 25 and a symphonic concert Oct. 24 at the Krasnoyarsk Regional Philharmonic as part of the First Dmitri Hvorostovsky International Festival.

## Three Kazakh films featured at Asian World Film Festival

Staff Report

**NUR-SULTAN** – Three Kazakh films, "The Golden Throne" by Rustem Abdrashov, "The Guardian of the Light" by Yermek Tursunov and "The Secret of a Leader" by Farkhat Sharipov, were featured Nov. 6-14 at the 9th Asian World Film Festival in Los Angeles (U.S.), reported Kazinform.

"The Golden Throne" is the film version of the second season of "The Kazakh Khanate" TV series. It focuses on the history of the struggle for the Great Steppe

and forming Kazakh statehood. The film is based on "The Diamond Sword," the first novel in Ilyas Yessenberlin's trilogy "The Nomads." "The Golden Throne" has been nominated in the 2020 Oscars' Best International Feature Film category.

"The Guardian of the Light" tells the story of a soldier returning home from war. He has a portable projector and some films, both gifts from an old German man who saved his life. The film had its world premiere earlier this year at the Shanghai Film Festival.

"The Secret of a Leader"

relates the story of Kanat, a 40-year-old bank employee undergoing a midlife crisis. Realising he has neither dreams nor expectations, he decides to attend personal development training where a coach teaches him how to achieve success and become a leader. Kanat tries to change himself and his view of life, but his fate suddenly makes a sharp turn when he meets Daniyar, an old acquaintance. The film won the grand prix at the 41st Moscow International Film Festival and the 15th Eurasia International Film Festival.

"The Guardian of the Light," "The Secret of a Leader" and "Tomiris" have been nominated for the 2020 Golden Globes' Best Foreign Language Film award.

Each movie was shot at the Kazakhfilm studio named after Shaken Aimanov by an order of the Kazakh Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Asian World Film Festival is organised with the support of the city's Asian communities for those interested in foreign and independent films. Films from more than 50 countries such as India, Japan and Turkey were featured in this year's event.



Photo credit: Asian World Film Festival.

## International composers contest discovers young talents

Continued from Page B1

The competition is unique, as it has three nominations, symphonic music, chamber music and vocal music, at once, he added.

All jury members gave lectures and shared their insights, experience and piano techniques during the first four days.

The competition is a chance for young talents to present their best work and a contribution in popularising classical and modern aca-

demie music. Italian composer Annachiara Gedda won the grand prix of the competition.

"I enjoyed the concert and I think that promoting such international competitions for young composers is an excellent idea... I am particularly happy about the performance of Italian composers: five took part at the competition and all of them received some prize from the jury. One of them, Miss Annachiara Gedda won the grand prix. I received from the re-

tor her diploma on behalf of the embassy and we will let her have it as soon as possible," spectator and First Secretary of the Italian Embassy in Kazakhstan Matteo Petrini told The Astana Times.

"This result confirms the importance of a good partnership between Italy and Kazakhstan in the musical field, both for sharing performers and for training: every year our musical academies receive more and more Kazakh students," he added.



Rakhat-Bi Abdysagyn

Photo credit: qazmai.com

## Three films included in Golden Globe Awards long list

By Galiya Khassenkhova

**NUR-SULTAN** – The Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), which presents the Golden Globe Awards, recently published its long list in the Foreign Language Film category, reported Kazinform. The list includes three Kazakh films – "Tomiris" by Akan Satayev, "Shyraqsby" (Guardian of the Light) by Yermek Tursunov and "The Secret of a Leader" by Farkhat Sharipov.

"This year, 96 Foreign Language Films (from 65 countries) were eligible for Golden Globe consideration. That made for an intense viewing schedule... as well as for one of the greatest privileges of the year," according to the HFPA website.

To qualify for the award, a film must be a drama, musical or comedy with at least a 51 percent non-English language dialogue track. A film for the upcoming award must have been released in its production nation from Oct. 1, 2018 to Dec. 31, 2019.

HFPA will announce the short list in the category Dec. 9. The 77th annual ceremony will be held Jan. 5 in Los Angeles, California.

"Tomiris" recounts the story of

the sixth century BC Saki queen of the same name. She united Saki tribes against Persian invasion, then defeated and killed Persian king Cyrus the Great. The film, a story of bloodshed, deceit and revenge, had earned 480 million tenge (US\$1.2 million) by the end of October and was screened more than 800 times throughout Kazakhstan.

"Shyraqsby," also known as the "Keeper," tells a story of a soldier who returns home from World War II

with an old film projector. It was the gift of an old German man whom he rescued and the soldier always kept it. The world premiere was held at the Shanghai International Film Festival and the movie will open in Kazakhstan early next year. Lead actor Muratshan Mukazhanov received a Special Diploma "For creating a poetic image of the cinema art attendant" awarded by the Venice Film Festival grand jury. Cameraperson Martin Sechanov received the Kn-

yazhinski Prize for best camera work at Russia's Kinoshok Film Festival.

The existential drama "The Secret of a Leader" follows 40-year-old bank clerk Kanat. His midlife crisis hit him hard and he realises he has no dreams and cannot achieve anything in life. He opts to attend a personal growth training where he learns how to become successful, but the real change comes when he meets his old friend Daniyar. The film was the first in Kazakh cinema history to receive a grand prix at the 41st Moscow International Film Festival and was also awarded a grand prix at the XV Eurasia International Film Festival.

"Shyraqsby" and "The Secret of a Leader" were entered in the Asian World Film Festival Nov. 6-14 in Los Angeles.

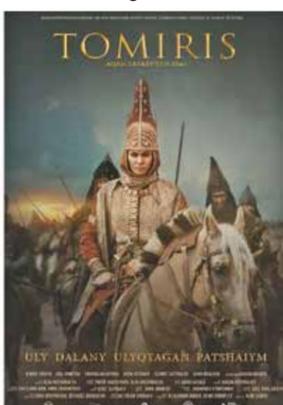
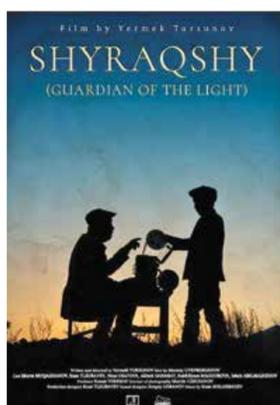


Photo credit: broad.kz

## Yerzhan Maksim places second in Junior Eurovision Song Contest

Continued from Page A1

Maksim's mother, Gulmira Alibek, also thanked the people who voted for her son.

"I want to express our gratitude to all of you who support Yerzhan. I think not only Kazakh citizens voted for him, but also people from foreign countries. We love everybody, thanks a lot to you all," she said.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev congratulated Maksim via Twitter.

"Yerzhan Maksim took second place in the prestigious Junior Eurovision Song Contest. It is a great success! I congratulate you, your parents and your teachers on this significant victory. I wish you success in future. Alga!" ("Onward!") wrote the President.

Maksim was picked by Kazakh broadcaster Khabar TV as Kazakhstan's representative for the 2019 Junior Eurovision Song Contest in



July. Maksim comes from Oral and started singing at the age of five. In 2016, at age 12, he took first place at the Batumi Dolphin Fest. The next year, he came in second at the Slavianski Bazaar and last year came second in Kazakhstan's national final for Junior Eurovision Song Contest hopefuls.

This is only the second time Kazakhstan has participated in the Junior Eurovision Contest. Last year, Daneliya Tuleshova performed "Ozine Sen" ("Believe in Yourself") in two languages and came in sixth place with 171 points.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## Almaty city authorities present urban greening draft master plan

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Almaty Akim (Mayor) Bakytzhan Sagintayev reviewed a draft master plan on urban landscaping Nov. 13 based on the results of expert studies.

The plan involves planting millions of trees and shrubs in the city in the next three years to provide citizens with fresh air and well-maintained recreational zones.

“All the works on the city greening should be carried out in a single way, without spontaneous planting or tree pruning,” said Sagintayev.

The landscape designers determined the city currently has 894 hectares of green space, or 4.8 square metres per person. According to available data, the figure has decreased twofold since the 1970-80s, when it was nearly 10 square



Almaty Akim (Mayor) Bakytzhan Sagintayev.

metres per capita. The reduction is attributable to urban construction and population growth, noted the experts.

More than 130,000 trees and shrubs have been planted in Almaty in the last three years.

“The estimates indicate the effect of planting will be noticeable soon. Green spaces will produce about 18 million kilogrammes of oxygen and the city’s landscaping area grow up to 5,000 square metres. That will diminish the noise

level along the roads by 40 percent, as well as decrease the dust level by 75 percent within one kilometre of the green areas. A large number of recreational zones, squares and parks will positively affect the citizens and create comfortable conditions for urban life,” reported the akimat (city administration) press service.

To prevent greenery reduction, city officials plan to impose a ban on removing trees covering building and business façades. They will also tighten control over compensatory planting and increase the number of trees required to replace removed ones.

Sagintayev urged officials to finalise the master plan by clarifying the theoretical portion and setting specific measures such as tree nursery capacity, common approaches and greenery planting.

## Government to allocate almost \$13 billion to support teachers

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan’s new draft law on the status of teachers envisages the allocation of 5.2 trillion tenge (US\$12.9 billion) for wage increases, bonuses for pedagogical skills and classroom management, leave payments and other incentives for members of that profession over the next five years.

The new draft law provides 10 additional protections for teachers’ rights, including fines for demanding illegal overtime work from them.

The bill was developed on the instruction of Kazakhstan’s First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, given at the beginning of the year, by a working group consisting of scientists, teachers, lawyers, deputies and labour union representatives. Over a year, the group held meetings throughout the country and received more than 8,600 proposals from citizens. In August, the draft law was approved at a government session chaired by Prime Minister Askar Mamin.

The draft law meets the tasks set by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on developing the secondary education system and improving the quality of knowledge, Mamin said. Its implementation is intended to raise the status of teaching as a profession, protect teachers’ honour and dignity and create a system of social guarantees for them.

“One of the most important provisions of the draft law are material incentives. Teachers’ salaries

will rise by 25 percent next year,” Kazakh Minister of Education Askhat Aimagambetov told an expanded meeting of the Nur Otan Party’s board Nov. 14.

Nur Otan First Deputy Chair Bauyrzhan Baibek agreed with the minister and said the approach is the result of a “consistent policy” followed by Nazarbayev and Tokayev.

Baibek noted that more than half a million Kazakh citizens work in the field of education, and 81 percent of them are women. In addition to raising their wages, the government needs to address the problem of attracting and retaining qualified teachers at schools, especially in rural areas, as up to 35 percent of them tend to leave the profession.

“Despite the annual mass production of specialists, there is a constant need for teaching staff. And this is just a part of the issues we need to address,” he said.

Baibek also recalled that during the years of independence more than 1,800 new schools and almost 900 kindergartens had been opened throughout the country. The salaries of Kazakh teachers have increased 17-fold since 1997.

“Approximately 30 percent of Nur Otan members are teachers. The party will keep that matter under special control. The task is to expand the rights of the teachers and improve their social status by creating material and non-material incentives for teachers and conditions for creativity and effective work, as well as protecting from unforeseen inspections and unrelated functions,” said Baibek.

## President calls for abolition of mandatory registration of foreigners

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called for the country to end its requirement that foreign visitors register with migration authorities, saying at an Oct. 29 meeting in Almaty that the government should address the issue by the end of the year.

The procedure, he said, is a source of corruption. “If we really want to increase the investment and tourism attractiveness of the largest cities and the entire country, we should get rid of such anachronisms as compulsory reg-

istration of foreigners at migration offices. In addition to inconveniencing foreign visitors, the registration is a source of corruption, which negatively affects the state’s reputation,” Tokayev said.

Passing through Kazakhstan’s border controls should count as registration, the President said, and the government should take action before 2020.

“We received the President’s assignment; the implementation is underway. I suppose it will entail integrating information systems, the National Security Committee’s system in particular, which is responsible for our border and in-

formation systems. The appropriate legal acts will require amendments and alterations,” noted First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Marat Kozhayev.

Kazakh Ministry of Internal Affairs Migration Service Committee Chair Murat Kabdenov said authorities want to facilitate entry into Kazakhstan.

“Border registration already exists, but just for 57 overseas countries and five neighbouring ones. Now, the state bodies plan to make it affordable for all tourists arriving to Kazakhstan. First, we have to modernise the system, so that the border guards enter all necessary

data for the authorities, carrying out migration control,” said Kabdenov.

Kabdenov also noted the committee plans to amend Kazakhstan’s law on migration, extending the period requiring compulsory registration from five to 30 days. To date, citizens of nine foreign countries have to register with the Kazakh migration police within five days of entering the country.

“Thirty days are enough to see the country. If the visitors decide to extend their stay, they can apply through the E-gov website, with the migration service or even at any hotel for an extension,” he said.

## Baikonur modernisation projects step closer to fruition

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan is open to industrial cooperation in producing telecommunication satellites as well as common commercial projects at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin said during the Nov. 12 opening ceremony of the Space Days in Kazakhstan astronautics international forum.

“First President Nursultan Nazarbayev and President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pay special attention to the development of the Baikonur Cosmodrome’s infrastructure and its modernisation in accordance with advanced standards,” he said at this year’s forum, dubbed “Baikonur: Cradle of the World.”

The head of the Kazakh government noted the world’s first cosmodrome is now on the eve of a new stage of its development, requiring joint work by all the forces, ideas and partnerships that exist within its framework.

“Through the cooperation of Kazakh and French enterprises, the creation of a spacecraft assembly and testing facility complex is in the final stage. Its launch will allow the assembly and testing of satellites of different purposes. This project will support stable and long-term Kazakh-French industrial cooperation,” the prime minister told forum participants.

The Kazakh government plans to allocate \$300 million for space-based communication systems and Earth remote sensing (ERS), including private sec-

tor investments, Mamin added. To date, Kazakh enterprises and state bodies are actively interacting with Arabian, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish and many other countries’ space organisations. Collaboration on ERS data exchange, as well joint manufacturing and commercialisation of ERS satellite constellations, is on the way, as is a Russian project to build an environmentally friendly space rocket complex, dubbed Nazarbayev Launch, which will be run soon.

At the forum, Kazakhstan, Russia and the United Arab Emirates agreed to sign by the end of this year an agreement to modernise the Baikonur Cosmodrome’s first launch site, also known as Gagarin Start.

“The document on the Gagarin Start is at the finish line. Now we are discussing what procedures will be required for interstate approval of the instrument. We have arranged with our Kazakh and Arabian colleagues to do everything to sign this document by the end of the year,” Roskosmos State Corporation Director-General Dmitry Rogozin told forum participants.

The first Space Days in Kazakhstan forum in Nur-Sultan took place in 2013. The forum has become a dialogue platform for discussing more efficient use of the Baikonur Cosmodrome and the development strategy of the Kazakh space industry. More than 600 participants, including representatives of space agencies and 200 foreign delegates from 25 countries, attended the forum this year.

## Earthquake risk map to highlight vulnerable areas in Almaty

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Almaty city authorities have examined the city’s buildings to create a risk map to let people know which residential buildings can and should be renovated or redesigned to minimise earthquake consequences. The map will be released in 2020.

“We plan to release a risk map next year, which will clearly define what impact an earthquake could have. We have already carried out the certification of all city structures and we conducted certification of all apartment houses in Almaty built between 2001 and 2010. The newer ones are not subject to certification yet,” said Almaty Urban Planning and Urbanism Department head Almaskhan Akhmedzhanov at a Nov. 12 briefing.

Almaty is located in a seismically active zone. According to



the seismic micro-zone map the city is generating, the mountainous part of Almaty Region lies in the 10-point risk zone and the city centre is also in a high-risk zone. In case of a nine-point earthquake, more than half of Almaty’s buildings could be destroyed, the experts note. Nearly 85 percent of Almaty’s buildings date from the

second half of the last century, according to Almaty Akimat (city administration) data. Some of them are considered vulnerable to earthquake damage.

“We have a lot of old houses from the early 1970s that were built during the Soviet period of mass housing construction. These buildings have already confirmed

their seismic resistance. But of particular concern are the brick buildings of the 308 series, which do not meet the current regulation requirements and should be reconstructed. These constructions will represent much greater danger than recently built ones in the case of a major earthquake,” Akhmedzhanov noted.

Another issue to be addressed, and one raised frequently by Almaty residents, is the high building density of the city and the difficulty of evacuating if there is a disaster.

“We are controlling the process. Construction underway now is to replace dilapidated housing. To date, our goal is to reduce the density and height of buildings. One more significant problem we have already tackled is illegal building in parks and squares. Now, the appropriate law bans building there,” the official added.

## Ministry of Finance, banks discuss taxing cashless payments

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Ministry of Finance is in negotiations with the Kazakh banking community regarding taxing cashless payments, said National Bank Chairperson Yerbolat Dossayev Nov. 13, reported Zakon.kz. The system should increase budget revenue.

“I believe that the Ministry of Finance is not going to tax the payments, but wants to see that taxes are paid from these payments. On this issue, we are working together with the Ministry of Finance. I be-

lieve that an increase in non-cash payments should be accompanied by an increase in budget revenue. That’s natural,” he said.

Talks are underway between the ministry and banking community representatives and Dossayev emphasised the proposal would involve the entire banking sector.

“This was a proposal of the Ministry of Finance and currently it is being discussed with the banking community. This applies not only to payments of any particular bank; therefore, this applies to the entire banking sector,” he added.

First Vice Minister of Finance

Berik Sholpankulov spoke to reporters Nov. 7 after the Senate determined frequent transactions from various senders will be monitored to ensure their payments and resulting income are received. Each case must be considered individually.

“This applies to all transactions. There is a source – the recipient of these funds, they will be monitored by a tax account. For example, there are payments from different individuals. Why did someone start to get 1,000 tenge (US\$2.58) from everyone? It is clear that they create income. If you listed your

father in a one-time transaction, this is not your case. A risk management system will be set up that will track all these flows and put this person in check. If you drop payments – pay your bills or help your loved ones – this will all be considered individually; we do not think that all payments (are taxed),” he said.

As of Nov. 18, cashless payments represent 51.7 percent of monetary transactions in the country, with the balance made in cash. In December 2018, the ratio was 25.53 percent cashless and 74.7 percent cash.

# SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## Fourth version of Kazakh Latin script will preserve language purity, linguists say

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Scientists from the Baitursynov Institute of Linguistics and specialists involved in the working group on script transition presented the fourth version of the Kazakh alphabet in Latin script to the general public Nov. 6.

The new version is another step in the country's plan to transition to Latin script by 2025. The updated version has incorporated suggestions made by Kazakh citizens and criticism voiced by Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, its developers say.

According to the experts, the new version will regulate the law of syngarmonism (the law of vowel harmony) of the language, correct the mistakes made in Cyrillic



Photo credit: RIA News

and ease the translation of words borrowed from Russian.

"In Russian, some sounds are not marked because [the Russian language] didn't have that sound. For example, w. At first, they wrote it as v – Kokchetav – then as u. They said it was a vowel, then

a consonant," said Baitursynov Institute of Linguistics Chief Yerden Kazhybek, forbes.kz reports.

The new Latin script might still confuse Kazakhs who are used to the Cyrillic spelling of the language. According to linguists, the word "su," which means water,

for example, should be written as "suw."

"This is the correct spelling. If we simply write the letter y (the u sound in Russian), then we will lose this sound. Therefore, it is necessary to add y. For the younger generation, all this may seem wild. However, you need to get used to it. This is required by the law of language. There were already three versions of the alphabet that were not accepted, all due to the fact that the purity of the language was not preserved," said philology Professor Alimkhan Zhunisbek.

"If this alphabet is approved, the problem will be solved. Because w is being introduced. It replaces the sound y in the word tau. Then we can solve the problem by separating the consonant letter and the vowel u," said philology Professor Anar Salkynbai.

In the new version, linguists also added four characters borrowed from Russian.

"We still cannot get rid of samples of Russian words. Many people simply cannot break the habit. They ask, for example, how to spell the word futbol [football], vagon [carriage]. Therefore, in despair, I had to add four letters. These are h, c, f, then h," said Zhunisbek.

The alphabet uses the same set of 32 letters as Latin scripts. The new Kazakh script employs diacritic marks such as umlauts, brevis' and cedillas to replace digraphs.

"In the old alphabet, consonants and vowels are indicated by an acute accent. This is wrong, because the accents are not written with consonants. Instead, in our version, the diacritical marks in the form of wings [bre-

vis] stand above the consonants. Some vowels are umlauts," said Kazhybek, according to inform-buro.kz.

These new marks in the new version of Kazakh Latin are, in fact, from a long-forgotten old version of the written language.

"We proposed this option 20, 30 years ago. The Institute of Linguistics conducted research, wrote books, monographs and everywhere this alphabet was offered. The Turkic Academy offered it at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1991, 2012, we always talked about this option: linguistics for such an alphabet. What was discussed before was proposed by people who do not understand the language, do not know its laws. Our option will be the most convenient and easy for the population," he said.

## Naming children after events is trend, say researchers

By Galiya Khasenkanova

NUR-SULTAN – Researchers curious about trends in Kazakh baby names have determined national events play a significant role when parents make their choices, reported factcheck.kz.

Using data from the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy, they concluded cultural, political and religious events in the past 30 years have been quite influential. The researchers who discovered the trend presented their results at the American University of Central Asia summer institute in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

According to their data, the most popular girl names changed from Aigerim and Aidana in the 1990s to Aruzhan in the 2000s and Aiaru and Aizere in 2010s. Boy names moved from Alexander in the 1990s to Abai, Dias and Yerassyl in 2000s and Alikhan in the last five years.

When Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991 and Nursultan Nazarbayev became the first president, it triggered a wave of boys named after the head of state. More than 45,000 Kazakhs, the population of a small town, go

by that name. Nazarbayev's presidency also led to increased popularity of the suffix and postfix Nur; names that previously existed on their own changed, for example, to Nurzhamal or Nuraina.

"When people find out what my name is, they joke that Nursultan lives in Nur-Sultan. But seriously, the name helps me. Everyone thinks I am very responsible. I am proud of my name," said Nursultan Yegenberdiuly.

The country's independence is also reflected in fewer Slavic names and an increase in Kazakh or Arab and Persian ones. Slavic (and other European such as German) prisoners and families who were deported or sometimes forcibly resettled during the Soviet era were able to return to their homes in Russia, Ukraine or other nations, taking their cultural names with them.

Independence did not go unnoticed to those in the country, as it gave rise to names such as Mangilik (Kazakh for independence).

The fall of the Soviet Union also resulted in more people returning to their religion and with the renewed practice of Islam, related names reappeared. Ramazan (another rendering of Ramadan) became extremely popular for

children born during the holiday month. Eight of ten parents chose it during the sacred period, a name which did not make the top 20 in the remaining 11 months. Ramadan fell on May this year, and, according to statistics, Ramazan was the most popular name during the 30-day period, then quickly faded.

Cultural events are no less important. In 1995, Kazakhstan celebrated the 150th anniversary of famous national poet Abai Kunanbayev and his name was the top one of the year, said researcher Aslan Seit. The nation honoured writer and political figure Alikhan Bokeikhanov on his 145th anniversary in 2011 and, to no surprise, his name grew in popularity. Alikhan has a religious connotation as well, combining the name of the prophet Ali with khan, the word for ruler.

A generation of girls named Medina was born in 2018 after musician Jah Khalib released a song of the same name. Medina, derived from Arabic, is the city where the prophet Muhammed was born.

Any big event in Kazakhstan finds its place in the hearts and subsequently names of its citizens. In 2011, after Almaty held the Asian Winter Games, the world gained

56 girls named Aziada, Russian for Asian Games. Following the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Kazakhstan, 66 boys were named Samit (as transliterated from Russian) and 16 girls, Samita. EXPO 2017 produced a boy named Baidybekspo.

"I always wanted to name a son Baidybek, after the historical leader and the region where we lived before moving to Astana. After the opening of the international exhibition and as part of spiritual modernisation, we added the word 'expo' to this name," said father Meirambek Raimov.

Even the Nurlu Zhol (Hallowed Path) state programme on infrastructural development gave rise to Nurluzhols.

Naming newborns after life events is not new or surprising for Kazakhs. Even during Soviet times, some parents named their boys Sovet (Russian for Soviet). Today this is traceable through patronymics, because it is always a derivative of the father's name.

Researchers remind future parents that no matter what is happening in the country, a name is a lifetime commitment – or at least until the child comes of age.

## PIAAC releases results of survey of adult skills

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) published Nov. 15 an update to its 2013 report as the results from the third round of its Survey of Adult Skills in "Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills" and in OECD Skills Outlook 2013. New data is included for six countries, including Kazakhstan, which conducted the study for the first time, and the United States, which had previously collected data as part of the study's first round.

The survey assesses the proficiency of adults from the ages of 16 to 65 in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments, reads the report. These skills are key information-processing competencies that are relevant to adults in many social contexts and work situations, and necessary for full integration and participation in the labour market, education and training, as well as social and civic life.

The survey was conducted in three rounds with the participation of 39 countries and regions. The data for each round was collected in different years but the results of all rounds are comparable. The list of six countries participating in the third round of data collection includes Ecuador, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Peru and the United States.

"The third round of the survey is distinguished by the fact that most of the participating countries (four out of six countries) are above-average income countries according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's international report. In general, most of the PIAAC countries are high-income countries. The third round allows comparing the skills of adults in Kazakhstan with countries with a similar income level," reads the report.

Being a middle-income country, Kazakhstan is placed between these two groups of countries in the third round. The proportion of adults in Kazakhstan scoring at the highest levels in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills fell below that of Hungary and the United States, but above the share in Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. Overall, Kazakhstan performs at the study's Level 2 in both literacy and numeracy, and the proportion of the population scoring at Level 1 and below is close to the OECD average.

"A new economic policy cannot be implemented without human resources with high-level skills. Human resources should be competitive in the international labour market with advanced knowledge

and skills. The PIAAC has clearly demonstrated what imbalance in qualified personnel we have today," said Kazakh Vice Minister of Education and Science Sholpan Karinova at a Nov. 18 briefing.

Unskilled workers in OECD countries have the same skills as in Kazakhstan, with the difference between the two being statistically insignificant. However, the gap doubles as soon as a citizen of an OECD country begins to acquire qualifications and becomes a chasm between skilled workers, who in the OECD score 16 times higher than their Kazakh counterparts.

The survey was conducted in three rounds with the participation of 39 countries and regions. The data for each round was collected in different years but the results of all rounds are comparable. The list of six countries participating in the third round of data collection includes Ecuador, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Peru and the United States.

"The gap between unskilled and qualified personnel in Kazakhstan is three times smaller than in OECD countries. It turns out continuing education courses, trainings and other available informal education mechanisms work poorly in Kazakhstan. They do not boost competence. Either adult citizens are not motivated to build up their skills or they do not have the opportunity," she said.

Karinova noted that in this context it is necessary to take into account the specifics of work. For example, the recent OECD international study of teaching and learning, TALIS, shows that more than 90 percent of teachers have completed continuing education courses in the past year.

"We see the growing role of universities in disseminating best practices and skills. It is necessary to study the content and organisation of training courses. They have everything necessary for this," she said.

## Russian, Kazakh and US scientists publish study on electricity saving

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Russian, Kazakh and U.S. scientists published a joint study on the causes of electricity losses Nov. 14 that aims to save up to \$3 billion per year on electricity costs.

"We were able to reduce losses on corona discharges by 20-40 percent due to the application of a hydrophilic porous nanocomposite coating containing carbon nanoparticles on aluminium wires. The micro plasma oxidation method, which is distinguished by its simplicity and manufacturability, helped us in this process," said one of the authors of the research and Professor at MIFI National Research Nuclear University Zinetulla Insepov. The university was established in 2008 based on the famous "MIFI" – Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute, – a key institution in the Soviet Union's nuclear programmes, both peaceful and military ones.

The main electricity loss from power lines is currently associated with corona discharge, an independent discharge of electrodes with a significant surface curvature in the air in strongly inhomogeneous fields, reported RIA

News. Corona discharge mainly occurs in wet weather and total losses are estimated to be up to \$3 billion per year. This discharge has posed a problem since power lines were invented, but has not yet been completely resolved.

According to the study's authors, their work will provide a significant economic effect when using existing high voltage lines, which will not need to be replaced during their 20-40 year lifetime.

The simplicity of the anti-corona coating technology will allow its use in many areas of electrical engineering, where reducing corona losses is required.

In the subsequent research, scientists plan to expand the scope of the study and include developing both existing power lines and enterprises that produce electric cables for power lines.

Insepov's research focuses on the fundamental physics of

ion beam material processing, including very low energy ion-solid interactions. He developed cluster ion beam interaction simulation programmes based on molecular dynamics and Monte Carlo methods. He has also predicted a new lateral sputtering phenomenon that is a driving force behind the efficient atomistic smoothening mechanism of surfaces irradiated by large gas cluster ions.



Photo credit: RIA News

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

## Kazakh Tourism, Almaty announce new joint mountain tourism office

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh Tourism company and the akimats (administrations) of the city of Almaty and the Almaty Region announced Nov. 22 that they will launch a unified mountain tourism project office. The office is meant to coordinate the implementation of the national tourism programme in Almaty's mountains as well as help tourism companies implement and fund mountain tourism projects.

"Today, Kazakh Tourism, together with the akimats of Almaty and Almaty region, agreed to create a unified project office located in the akimat of the city. The main task of the office is to coordinate the implementation of the state programme on the Almaty mountain cluster and help the tourism business in the implementation of projects and the search for investors," head of Kazakh Tourism Yerzhan Yerkinbayev told *tengrinews.kz*.

Yerkinbayev added that after the initial stage of ratifying documents was complete, the focus would shift to implementing programmes to develop tourism.

"We have every opportunity to make the Almaty region a very attractive destination for tourists, we only need to join forces! Serious documents and

strategies were adopted – it is time to focus on their implementation! It is necessary that the effect of the implementation of the state tourism development programme is felt both by the tourist and the whole country, and for this, it is necessary for the cities, regions and national parks to join forces. A striking example of the first step in this direction will be the creation of the first regional project office, and Almaty proposed to launch it already this year," said Yerkinbayev.

Kazakhstan's national tourism programme was approved May 31. Its first result was the launch of the E-visa project, which decreases Kazakh visa processing time from 14 days to three to five days. In addition, the country accepted the Open Skies regime at 11 Kazakh airports. The regime allows foreign airlines to use Kazakh airports without prior registration.

Another focus area of the programme is building sanitary facilities across Kazakh tourist locations. By the end of 2019, a toilet map is planned to be created, and before the start of the summer tourist season of 2020, with the involvement of private investment, approximately 100 units of new sanitary facilities in the most popular tourist destinations in Kazakhstan are planned to be installed.



Photo credit: iStock/Matthias Rhode

## 22 tour companies take part in informational tour of the country

By Assel Satubaldina

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh Tourism, which oversees the nation's travel industry, has made another push to bolster domestic tourism. Its second information excursion ended Nov. 9, reported the company press service.

The tour, which started Oct. 30, was part of a cycle of similar trips conducted in an effort to stimulate and tap into the potential of seeing one's own country. It involved 22 tour operators from the capital and Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, who travelled to Aktau, Saryagash, Shymkent, Taraz and Turkestan.

"The main goal is to show the potential and opportunities of each region for companies involved in the development of domestic tourism to develop tour packages. During



Tour participants in the Mangystau Region.

the tour, tour operators shared their experience with the region in developing and potentially simplifying routes, improving services, training guides and promoting the region. This is the value of these tours," said the company.

In Taraz, an ancient city known for its rich historic and cultural heritage, the participants visited Ryskulbekov Park and Zheltoksan Alley, the locations of the country's highest, 220-metre fountain and Podvig Memorial Complex.

They also saw some of the nation's most popular tourist and pilgrimage sites, including Aisha Bibi, Babadzha Khatun, Dautbek, Karakhan and Khoja Ahmed Yassawi mausoleums.

While in Turkestan, they participated in the Turkestan: One Way – One History international investment forum, sharing their vision for developing the city that has been the centre of the region of the same name since 2018 and attracted significant national attention.

The tour operators also travelled across the Mangystau Region which, located on the shores of the Caspian Sea, offers numerous historic and pil-

grimage sites. Although the destinations are not easy to reach, those who do have the chance to see a landscape stunning in its diversity.

The participants also attended B2B meetings with local tour companies to build new partnerships and exchange ideas on ways to improve tourism in the region. The sessions concluded by signing 132 agreements.

The tour operators noted the cities on their route, which in the past were along the Silk Road, may generate interest among both foreign and local tourists.

They also drew attention to some recurring problems noticed during their travels, including the lack of English-speaking guides and the need to develop infrastructure to ensure more comfortable conditions and organise entertainment events.

The first trip in May involved tour operators from four regions in western Kazakhstan. They travelled to the capital, Almaty, the Almaty Region, Burabai area, East Kazakhstan Region, Saryagash and Shymkent.

Nearly 800 agreements were signed as a result of the tours. A third trip is slated to the Burabai area at the end of the year.

Photo credit: Kazakh Tourism press service

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

# AVANGAR defeats Syman Gaming cyber athletes at WESG Central Asia, both qualify for WESG Asia



By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh AVANGAR cybersport club won Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO), defeating Syman Gaming at the Nov. 16-17 World

Electronic Sports Games (WESG) Central Asia 2019 in Almaty. Both finalists qualified for the Asian championship.

Six teams from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan received one million tenge (US\$ 2,584) and advanced to WESG Asia to

take place Jan. 2-5 in Kuala Lumpur.

“One more trophy added to our collection. On to the next tournament – CS:GO World Finals in China in March,” said the AVANGAR Twitter page.

With \$1 million at stake, the Asian championship will deter-

mine the best two teams of 16 to play at the CS:GO World Finals in China in March.

Kazakhstan hosted the Central Asian e-sports tournament for the first time as part of Kazakhtelecom’s digital development programme.

“You know that the traditions of e-sports in our country have developed over decades, but today a new page has been written in this story. Our country is hosting a major international tournament for the first time and we are pleased to welcome its participants

to our land,” said Qazaq Cyber-sport Federation (QCF) President and Kazakhtelecom Board Chair Kuanyshbek Yessekeyev at the competition.

The national telecommunication company organised the event with support from the championship’s general partner, Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund.

The online audience on gaming day exceeded 30,000. StarLadder expert Igor “SL4M” Sopov and Kazakh commentator Nurlan “Tsunami” Abayev provided the commentary.

AVANGAR is now in the top ten of the CS:GO world ranking. The win was its second against Syman Gaming.

The Kazakh teams met in September at the StarLadder Berlin Major 2019 World Championship in Germany. AVANGAR reached the final, but lost to Denmark’s Astralis to take the second place.

WESG, organised by Alibaba Sports, is an international e-sports championship with several qualifying stages. It is based in Shanghai.

# Football team beats San Marino in EURO 2020 qualifying game, loses to Scotland

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh football team defeated the team from San Marino 3-1 Nov. 17 in the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) EURO 2020 qualifying game.

“First of all, I want to note the significance of this victory. The weather led to adjustments to the game by both teams. I liked how we played in the first half. We were able to score fast and, just as importantly, beautiful goals. In the second half, there was a certain decline, as a result of which the team did not score and conceded a goal into their own net,” said Kazakh team head coach Mikhail Bilek.

Kazakh midfielder Bakhtiyer Zainutdinov scored the first goal at the sixth-minute mark, followed by defender Gafurzhan Suyumbayev in the 23rd minute. Striker Alexei Schetkin scored the final goal in the 27th minute.

Right winger Filippo Berardi scored San Marino’s only goal in the 77th minute.

Despite the win, Schetkin noted the team will work on preventing

opponents from scoring in the second half.

“I think that we played well in the first half. Scored three goals, constantly attacked. In the second half, we did not have the best game. Somewhere (we) relaxed, made mistakes. Missed a goal. In addition, we had few moments in the second half. We will analyse the game to play better in the future,” he said.

The team achieved its main goal of the game, said Bilek.

“He (Schetkin) told them that you need to play the same way as in the first half – actively, control the ball and score the goal if possible. At the end of the second

half, I got a little hooked, but I note that the main goal – three points – was achieved. Some teams struggle there. The team from Scotland scored the second goal only at the end of the match. Therefore, it cannot be said that San Marino is a weak opponent,” said Bilek.

On Nov. 19, the Scottish team beat the Kazakh team 3-1 in a game that again began with the visitors scoring the first goal in the first half but then conceding the three in the second half, including one in the stoppage time. In March, in the first qualifying game of EURO 2020, Kazakhstan beat Scotland 3-0.



# Kazakhstan wins Davis Cup doubles match with Netherlands, loses to UK

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh tennis players Alexander Bublik and Mikhail Kukushkin won the first doubles match against the Netherlands at the Davis Cup in Madrid, Spain, Nov. 20, reports Olympic.kz.

“It was a great match,” said Kazakh Davis Cup Team Captain Dias Doskarayev. “This is the Davis Cup, here any athlete can show a good result, regardless of his rating. I am just glad that we won this time against tennis players of such a high calibre. I must admit that (Dutch player Robin) Haase demonstrated an incredible game against Alexander Bublik. Alexander, in turn, gave all his strength in his match. Before the doubles meeting, we were the underdogs of the tournament. This victory is very important for us, a difficult match with the United Kingdom team awaits.”

Bublik and Kukushkin beat Haase and Jean-Julien Rojer from the Netherlands 6:4, 7:6 (7:2).

The Kazakh team’s makeup was the result of a last-minute decision by Doskarayev, who replaced Alex-

ander Nedovesov and Andrey Golubev with Kukushkin and Bublik. “Why did Mikhail Kukushkin and Alexander Bublik replace Alexander Nedovesov and Andrey Golubev? Everything is simple. We always say that each of our tennis players, if necessary, should be ready to play in a doubles match. So, today, it just happened,” Doskarayev told informburo.kz about replacing Nedovesov and Golubev.

The Kazakh team was accompanied in Spain by its fan club from Kazakhstan, who came to express their support for the team.

“For our part, we will do every-

thing so that their jitters quickly disappear. They definitely won’t feel like this is a regular visit by the fan club,” Alexander Oleinik, Kazakh tennis team fan club member, told informburo.kz.

Kazakhstan’s team this tournament was Kukushkin, Bublik, Nedovesov, Golubev and Dmitry Popko.

Alexander Bublik and Mikhail Kukushkin also lost Nov. 22 to Jamie Murray and Neil Skupsky from the United Kingdom with a score of 6:1, 6:4. Thus, the Kazakh team finished second in the C group and was not selected for the tournament play-off.



L-R: Alexander Bublik and Mikhail Kukushkin.

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2019

# Unique English language school teaches through music

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Scott's Music Room, a unique English language school based in the capital, offers interactive classes delivered by British music teacher and founding director Joe Scott.

Preston-born Scott opened the school with his wife Gaukhar in 2018. There are no extra requirements to enjoy the classes, as the lessons are designed for all ages and abilities.

"Most people accept the fact that music and singing affect language development, but perhaps they have not seen how this can be done in the way that we do. We use Instagram to show parents what's going on in the class and how the activities work. People have expectations that their child will improve their English and pronunciation. We also recognise this is what the parents really want and we try to make sure that our approach meets their expectations," he said in an interview for this story.

The couple, who started with a small number of students, has seen the business steadily grow as more people hear about the classes.

"Most parents are surprised by our lessons because they are very different than the music lessons they had in their own childhoods. This is why we opened a class for adults – it is never too late to make music part of your life! People have such busy lives and I respect anybody who takes the time to learn an instrument and also support their child's musical education," he noted.

If he were teaching in England, parents would not be as interested in improving their child's pronunciation, but they recognise what Kazakh parents want.

"We want to help people make their children confident in English. A lot of parents in Nur-Sultan are looking to boost their children's English level with a



L-R: Gaukhar and Joe Scott teaching English through music.

native speaker and, of course, music is very highly valued in Kazakhstan. We speak English during the classes. There are chances that children can be confused, but it's important to support them. English is the target language," he added.

Scott began working as a year one teacher at the Haileybury Astana School in 2011. Later, he became the head of the junior music programme. Now he enjoys the life of an entrepreneur.

"We run the centre as a family business, which helps to make

our customers feel welcome and comfortable. It is important that music and language education happen in a friendly environment and we teach through interactive games, songs and activities. There are many instruments in our music room for the children to play," he said.

The centre offers special classes on recorder (blokflyta) and ukulele for older students. A feeling of energy and excitement pervades the room during group lessons as the children love making music with their new friends.

"I have always believed that music should be enjoyable and also that the best progress can be achieved when children first develop a love of music," he added.

Scott's family lives in north-west England near Manchester. He has played piano, violin and trombone since childhood and later focused on composing, improvisation, ukulele and oud, an Arabic stringed instrument.

At 14, he began studying at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, then continued at Cardiff University and the Uni-

versity of Cambridge in 2009-2011. He has a teaching degree (PGCE) from Buckingham University, which allows him to teach in different countries.

"I have been interested in music since childhood. My parents were not pushing me – I just realised that I wanted to play and they supported my choice. I believe that for a child to become a musician, they have to choose music themselves. They can't be pressurised. Otherwise, they find themselves in the situation where they can have a fantastic music

education, but they don't have any wish to play. That's very upsetting," he said.

Scott finds Kazakh music beautiful and especially likes the sound of the kobyz (a two-stringed instrument) and zhetegen (a seven-stringed zither).

"Music has plenty of benefits. It helps children to listen attentively, behave well, learn languages and mathematics, develop coordination skills, improve reading, enjoy themselves, be part of a team and other skills," he said.

Most importantly, Scott believes music lessons from a native speaker also help children develop a deep connection with the English language and learn pronunciation and vocabulary.

He noted the challenges of running a business in Kazakhstan are similar to those in other countries.

"We run the centre as a family business, which helps to make our customers feel welcome and comfortable. It is important that music and language education happen in a friendly environment."

"My wife takes care of the business side of things and she also supports the children in the lessons. One particular challenge is that the format of our classes is quite unique in Kazakhstan, so we have to take extra time to explain the benefits to our customers. I am so grateful to be able to live in Kazakhstan and I feel very welcome here," he said.

# City hosts True or False Media Championship



By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh capital hosted the True or False Media Literacy Championship Nov. 16, reported the akimat (city administration) website.

The project, aimed at improving young people's media literacy, began in the city in mid-October and involved 150 individuals aged 14-29.

Fifty contestants participated in the championship, conducted in the brain ring format. They competed in areas such as fact checking, fake news, propaganda and data hygiene, all of which are directly connected with implementing media research.

Famous journalists, bloggers and experts presented TED (technology, entertainment, design) Talks outlining their meth-

ods of arranging and providing information and news. Youth organisation heads, deputies and public activists were also among the visitors. The winner received the main prize of 300,000 tenge (US\$775).

The first True or False Project was held in 2018 as part of the Rukhani Janghyru (Modernisation of Kazakhstan's Identity) programme. This year, the project was initiated by the Zhas Ulan National United Child and Youth Organisation and supported by the Eurasia Monitor Analysis Centre and the capital's Social Development Department.

Applications were filed in September and October, then the board determined approximately 300 candidates, 229 of whom were students and high schoolers. Of the applicants, 180 were chosen to participate in three-

week trainings, divided into six groups by age category.

"We received more than 300 applications within a week after the project was announced. The candidates had to take a test consisting of 10 questions. Then, we chose those who got the minimal number of correct answers; that is, the people who need our training more than others," said Zhas Ulan Organisation Chair Dinara Sadvakassova.

Eight leading experts in IT, cyber security and communications held trainings and lectured on critical thinking and cyberspace analysis skills.

"Our young people should be ready for speed, which the contemporary information moves at, and technology development. We launched this project considering the issues' relevance," noted the organisers.

# Nur-Sultan's embassies donate baskets of national products to Dec. 1 Christmas Charity Bazaar

Continued from Page A1

The number of participants in the raffle grows every year. For the 12th Charity Bazaar, the ASA printed 10,000 tickets, Gifford said, noting that she's seen a lot of interest in the event. "We seemed to have a good response," she said.

In 2018, the bazaar raised nearly 38 million tenge (US\$97,692). The association used the money raised there to complete 50 projects helping small settlements, villages, towns and other regional cities tackle a range of challenges, including building rehabilitation centres for children, buying equipment for schools and helping low-income families.

Visitors to the bazaar can sample the national food of 53 countries at once. Participating embassies can introduce visitors to their culture through their national products.

"Every year the sum gets bigger. [People] learn more and more about the bazaar," said spouse of the Spanish ambassador Janna Bugaeva.



L-R: Radisson Hotel Astana General Manager Gaukhar Dikhanbayeva and ASA President Luzia Sebasta Schmid.

"The whole reason we do this is to support charity in Kazakhstan. I think it is absolutely fantastic because none of the money goes to us, even though we work very hard. Every penny goes to the charities. Some of the charities are in Karaganda, mostly in Nur-Sultan. There is one in Almaty. I am not sure this year, because it changes every year. It's all very worthwhile," said Gifford.

The ASA also wants to reduce the use of plastic during the

event. Many embassies, for example, decorated their baskets in non-plastic wrapping. The British embassy will provide 3,000 cotton bags for shoppers at the bazaar.

Raffle tickets will be sold Nov. 27-29 in the lobby of the Radisson Hotel Astana from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m., as well as during the day of the Charity Bazaar.

For updates, follow the Charity Bazaar's Instagram pages @charitybazaar2019 and @bazaar.astana.