



Tokayev discusses economic cooperation with German leaders, offers special conditions to German investors

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev discussed economic cooperation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and German entrepreneurs during Tokayev's Dec. 5-6 official visit to Berlin.

"The purpose of my visit is to give an additional impetus, primarily to economic cooperation and political interaction. It so happened that Germany, being the fourth largest world economy, occupies the 12th place in our economy in terms of investment presence. I expressed the hope that in the very near future the situation will be corrected in favour of Germany," Tokayev told a press conference following his talks with Merkel.

Tokayev also addressed the session organised by the Berlin Eurasian Club, where he expressed Kazakhstan's commitment to providing German investors with special conditions, such as a tax exemption regime in special economic zones and infrastructural conditions.

"We are ready to give you the maximum of existing preferences, including a tax exemption regime in special economic zones, provision of infrastructure, etc. I set the task for Kazakh Invest and the



L-R: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Kazakh Direct Investment Fund to open special offices that will cooperate with German investors," said Tokayev, according to akorda.kz.

Tokayev noted the measures are unprecedented for Kazakhstan.

"These measures are new to our

system. Previously, we did not provide such conditions to any other country. I sincerely hope that with the right approach and attitude, the Government and investors will make them truly effective," he said.

Germany sees Central Asia as a key part of the world economy, Merkel said during a joint press conference with Tokayev after their talks on Dec. 5.

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Kazakhstan inks agreements with Tyson Foods, Valmont Industries

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin oversaw the signing of agreements with American agribusiness titans Tyson Foods and Valmont Industries Dec. 9 during his working visit to the United States. The companies will invest in a new meat processing plant and a new plant to produce irrigation systems in Kazakhstan.

Tyson Foods, the largest meat processing company in the U.S., will invest in the construction of a modern meat processing complex in Kazakhstan. The slaughterhouse will have the capacity to process approximately 2,000 head per day.

The Kazakh government, Tyson Foods and Kusto Group, a Singapore-based company involved in beef production in Kazakhstan, will provide capital for the plant's construction. It is expected that the new enterprise will meet the needs of the Kazakh market and help boost agricultural exports. Kazakhstan's agriculture industry currently earns the country more than \$1 billion per year.

"Tyson Foods is a world-class company with the experience Kazakhstan needs to make a breakthrough in the development of meat processing and increase the number of livestock on farms," Mamin said, the prime minister's website reports.

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Country repatriates 14 children from Iraq

By Assel Satubaldina

BAGHDAD – Kazakhstan returned 14 children from Iraq Nov. 27 after a nearly nine-month-long effort by the Kazakh government with the support of Iraqi officials. The mission, which included representatives of the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, doctors, social workers and the media, travelled to Baghdad to pick up the youngsters on a chartered flight.

The children are aged from two to thirteen. Some were school age when their parents took them to the alleged Islamic State caliphate in Iraq and Syria, while most were born there.

The kids have witnessed the horrors of war and conflict after spending almost two years in the Rusafa prison in Baghdad with their mothers. The women are serving life sentences, which means 25 years in Iraq, for their involvement in the terrorist activity. Six Kazakh women are incarcerated.

The children's fathers have been killed. One youngster lost both parents and was taken from an orphanage.

The process to return the children started in March, said Foreign Ministry Ambassador at Large Stanislav Vassilenko, when the government learned its citizens were in the Iraqi prison.

"We started negotiations with

the Iraqi authorities. This was a long negotiation process because we all had a big task to make sure that they are actually Kazakh citizens. We conducted DNA tests to find relatives here in Kazakhstan," he said in an interview for this story, on a plane on the flight to Baghdad.

The children hail from different regions of the country and their relatives greeted them at the capital airport. They will spend at least one month in a rehabilitation centre in the city, where they will receive appropriate care and support, including from specialised psychologists, to help them recover from the psychological and physical trauma.

Kazakhstan is also in negotiations with Iraqi authorities to extradite the six women from the prison. The lack of an extradition agreement with Iraq, however, has inhibited the process.

"Again, this process is long, but I hope it will be successful. I would like to say that Iraq also does not have such an extradition treaty with Russia, which evacuated a sufficiently big number of its children, but the Iraqi authorities do not give women away. They did not give women back to Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan or Kazakhstan. We will carry on these long-running negotiations," explained Vassilenko.

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Nazarbayev named honorary chair of Central Asian Consultative Meeting, proposes solidifying cooperation

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan's First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, attended the second Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Nov. 29, where he was named Honorary Chair. Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Zheenbekov, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov bestowed the title on Nazarbayev.

"Nursultan Nazarbayev, at the invitation of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, arrived in Tashkent to participate in the second Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia. At

the airport, Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov met Nazarbayev," Nazarbayev's press service announced.

This is not the first honorary title Nazarbayev, who now carries the title Elbasy or Leader of the Nation, has received since his resignation last March. Six months ago, he was named honorary chair of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which includes Russia, Armenia and Belarus in addition to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, he is also an honorary senator, a title proposed by Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

During the consultative meeting, the Central Asian leaders discussed regional cooperation in politics, trade, economics, investment and other fields.

"Today, we will discuss pressing issues of interaction and agree on priority measures aimed at expanding the partnership of Central Asia," the Uzbek President said. "The meeting's agenda includes regional policy issues, cooperation in trade, economy, investment, transport and communication spheres; scientific, technical and humanitarian exchanges; as well as ensuring security in Central Asia. We have to adopt the regulations and a joint statement, as well as determine the place and time of the next consultative meeting."

As a way to unify efforts to strengthen cooperation and increase quality of life in the region, Nazarbayev proposed an "Agreement on Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation for the Develop-

ment of Central Asia in the 21st Century."

"This fundamental political document should reflect the basic principles and goals of our interaction. The agreement will also include provisions on mutual respect of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of our countries," said Nazarbayev.

He also proposed holding a Central Asian Security Council Secretaries meeting next year to strengthen security in the region and called attention to Central Asia's rapid demographic changes. Regarding cultural and humanitarian interaction, the First President proposed allocating 10 scholarships for students from each participating nation that will allow them to study in the best universities of Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev also proposed establishing Central Asia Day on March 15, the day the first consultative meeting was held in 2018 in Kazakhstan's capital. According to him, the dialogue that was launched then opened a new page in the history of Central Asia.

"It drastically improved the picture of our cooperation. The dialogue signalled to the five countries that our friendship will live for centuries. Contacts started activating on all levels," he said.

Nazarbayev also met with Mirziyoyev, discussing the close relationships between their nations, which through years of cooperation has reached a new qualitative level. Nazarbayev emphasised that Mirziyoyev's initiative to hold the consultative meetings facilitated the region's multifaceted cooperation and presented a platform for promoting collaboration.

The next Consultative Meeting will take place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.



Photo credit: Akorda.kz

Balandin wins gold, silver at US open swimming championship

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh Olympic champion Dmitriy Balandin won silver Dec. 9, finishing a 200-metre distance in 2 minutes, 09 seconds 71 hundredths at the men's breaststroke final of 2019 U.S. Open Swimming Championship in Atlanta, reported olympic.kz.

Cody Miller was .04 seconds ahead of Balandin. Andrew Wilson closed the top three finishing the 200 breaststroke in 2:10.10.

Miller's win caused a number

of lead changes in the 200 breast. He swam a very even race at 29.3 / 33.3 / 33.3 / 33.6.

Balandin moved from 7th to 4th to 5th to 2nd, and Wilson went from 4th to 5th to 4th to 3rd. Kevin Cordes held the lead over the first half of the race with 28.30 and 1:02.46 at the 50 and 100 walls, reported swimswam.com.

This is Balandin's second medal after he won gold at the 100 breaststroke of the championship. He won gold Dec. 4 finishing a 100-metre distance in 59.36 seconds.

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NATION

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Kazakhstan celebrates Day of First President

By Assel Satubaldina

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan celebrated the Day of the First President Dec. 1 with concerts, thematic exhibitions and firework displays.

The holiday, established in recognition of Nursultan Nazarbayev's achievements, has been commemorated annually since 2012. The day marks the date in 1991 when he was elected by popular vote in the country's first-ever presidential election.

Twenty-eight years later, the day also has historical significance, as Nazarbayev resigned earlier this year. Kazakhstan has had no other leader since its independence and 2019 saw the first presidential election where he was not a candidate.



Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Despite his resignation, Nazarbayev continues to play a significant role in the country's political and economic life. He travels throughout the world representing

the nation and maintains contact with foreign leaders.

As part of the festivities, the Kazakh National Museum in the capital hosted the Historic

Choice exhibit. Residents of the city and Almaty enjoyed fireworks shows.

The shows in the capital were at the Yessil River embankment, near Khan Shatyr Mall at the intersection of Abylai Khan Avenue and Pushkin Street. In Almaty, the show was at Kok Tobe and First President's Park.

To commemorate the important date, the First President's television and radio complex released a short documentary featuring rare archive photos from Nazarbayev's years in office. It also presents the way foreign leaders have perceived him and his role in the country.

"We met with President Nazarbayev at the time when there was no confidence whether the Soviet Union would exist or not, but anyways, everyone expected this.

We met with him at the beginning of a new start. All our discussions and conversations were about this new reality. Even the launch of the Soyuz spacecraft at Baikonur was under the 'peace' motto. This is what united us. Nazarbayev signalled that the new start would bring a new system, new chances and new future," said former Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitzky (1986-1997) in the film.

"He was the first leader after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He led, built a country, opened the world to it, built a new capital. I like the mixture of intelligence and common sense, which you usually call wisdom. This is what I appreciated on many occasions when I met with President Nazarbayev," added former Italian prime minister Romano Prodi (1996-1998, 2006-2008).

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is developing its extensive migration profile with the International Organisation for Migration, reported the ministry press service Dec. 5. A country document will consist of detailed statistical and analytical information to assess migration situation. In the future, the profile will allow creating separate strategic directions based on factual data. The Mazhilis (lower house Parliament) is studying a draft law on amendments and additions to some legislative acts to regulate migration processes. The law provides measures to improve the mechanism for attracting labour immigrants, address migrant issues brought to administrative responsibility and implement international readmission standards in national legislation.

Domestic airlines reduced the average fare on internal routes by 12 percent, according to the Ministry of Investment and Infrastructural Development press service. FlyArystan, the country's first low-cost airline, has affected the market and increased domestic competition, which led to lower airfares. Passenger traffic increased by 48 percent in Nur-Sultan, 45 percent in Almaty, 57 percent in Shymkent and 90 percent in Karaganda.

Nur-Sultan hosted Kazakhstan's first Dell Technologies Forum Nov. 28. The company, which as of February had 30.4 percent women employees, has set the goal of increasing the number to 50 percent and the number of women managers by 40 percent by 2030, said Key Account Manager Anna Shemanskaya. The event gathered 250 leading local and foreign IT industry experts to discuss digital transformation. Dell Technologies is also involved in implementing major government initiatives, including the Digital Kazakhstan programme.

ArcelorMittal Temirtau will invest in General Electric electrostatic precipitators to improve environmental performance at its Karaganda metallurgical plant, reported the company press service. The project includes a fully automated emission cleaning system regulated by the electrostatic precipitator integrated controller. The system maximises purifying sinter emissions and optimising energy consumption. "The project to build new electrostatic precipitators instead of battery cyclones is being implemented as part of an environmental action plan agreed with the Kazakh Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Water Resources. Dust emissions from sintering machines will be reduced by 25-30 percent by the end of 2021," said ArcelorMittal Temirtau Environmental Director Galina Drozdova.

Seven renewable energy projects will be implemented in the Akmola Region, according to Kazinform, as 45 percent of all electricity generated is expected to be from renewable energy sources by 2023. Three investment projects worth 60 billion tenge (US\$156 million) have already been executed, including a 45-megawatt wind power station in the Yereymentau district, 750,000-kilowatt capacity wind power installation at the Rodina agriculture farm and 100-megawatt wind farm in the Arshaly District. "Existing wind farms have already provided 17 percent of the total energy generated in the region. This indicator will increase to 22 percent by the end of 2019 with the launch of CATEK Green Energy," said Karashash Samratova, an energy manager with the regional Department of Energy and Housing and Public Utilities.

The share of farm animals and goods production increased in the Kostanai Region according to results from the first 10 months of the year, reported Kazinform. Approximately 1,700 tonnes of beef were exported and all food product exports totalled more than \$115 million. Agriculture represents an 11.2-percent share of the gross regional product. "More than 125,000 people work in the agriculture industry. This is 26 percent of the total employed population. The region threshed three million tonnes of grain.

New law makes ministers, governors responsible for corruption among subordinates

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed a law making ministers and akims (governors) responsible for corruption among their direct subordinates Nov. 28. The law introduces amendments that will oblige ministers and governors to resign if the top officials in their institutions are found guilty of corruption.

"If we seriously want to eradicate corruption, then, in my opinion, state bodies' heads should resign if their subordinates commit corruption crimes. To accept or not

accept the resignation is the prerogative of the Head of State, but a resignation letter is a mandatory measure," said Tokayev, according to the presidential website.

The new version of the law obligates a supervisor to resign within 10 calendar days of an employee's conviction of corruption.

"From now on, political civil servants, which include ministers and their deputies; regional akims (governors) and their deputies; akims (mayors) of Nur-Sultan, Almaty and Shymkent; and district akims are required to resign if their direct subordinates commit a corruption crime," said First Deputy Chairman of the

Anti-Corruption Service Olzhas Bektenov.

The new law envisages two types of responsibilities. The first is the responsibility of political civil servants to resign after a court verdict coming into force in case of a corruption offence by subordinates appointed by that political civil servant.

The second is a disciplinary responsibility for corruption violations committed by employees who are directly subordinate to political civil servants. This includes administrative employees such as department directors, office heads and division heads.

The minister will be liable if

his deputies, executive secretary, heads of staff or regional divisions commit offences. The vice minister is responsible for the heads of supervised departments and independent structural units. Akims of regions or cities of national significance, including the capital, are responsible for their deputies, chiefs of staff and akims of the districts.

According to Bektenov, the supervisor must resign regardless of whether he or she appointed the employee in question. The decision to accept the resignation lies with the president.

"For the first time in the history of independent Kazakhstan, the

responsibility of the supervisor for his subordinate is stated at the legislative level," he said.

Under the previous law, a person was liable only if he himself committed the violation. This means there were no legal grounds for disciplining heads of state bodies whose employees were systematically corrupt.

The new amendments are introduced in eight codes and 19 laws on civil service and anti-corruption practices.

Annually, more than 2,000 corruption crimes are registered in Kazakhstan and more than 1,000 people are held accountable on average.

UAPF head cautious about Singapore pension system...

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Unified Accumulative Pension Fund (UAPF) head Zhanat Kurmanov, speaking during the second Strategic Initiatives Forum Nov. 20 in the capital, suggested the Singapore pension system example should be viewed with caution.

"There are countries with rich experience in pension system functioning and one of them is Singapore. It should be noted that there is no ideal pension system in the world. All experts agree that a mixed pension system, which represents the state, an employee and an employer, is the most stable. There is a need to be careful with the Singapore pension system, because there are certain economic differences between our countries," he said.

He noted specific economic factors influenced the formation of Kazakhstan's current pension system.

"We have already decided not to completely copy Singapore's experience in 1998. One should always approach [this] carefully, through the prism of current economic calculations [that are] 40-50 years in advance," he added.

Kurmanov emphasised many neighbouring countries are interested in the Kazakh model.

"Russia and Georgia show great interest in our pension system. We have implemented a very consistent and technological concept. It is an institution which invests pension funds around the world and collects all the results by the end of the day. The next day you see the investment results in your account. We provide 80 percent of services to citizens remotely. Many issues have really been resolved," he said.

Kazakh experts proposed using Singapore as an example after determining the need to reform the Kazakh system. More than 70 percent of citizens with pension savings have less than a mil-



Zhanat Kurmanov

lion tenge (US\$2,500), which is not even enough for a mortgage down payment. A new system will hopefully not only allow people to save for their pension, but also accumulate funds for housing and other needs.

In Singapore, both the employee and employer make monthly deposits into the pension fund, which are then distributed to three different accounts – regular, special and medical.

The funds from a regular account depositor can be used to purchase housing or pay for the person's or another family member's education. Funds accumulated in a special account are the "untouchable" pension reserve. If the depositor loses the ability to work or is diagnosed with a serious or incurable illness, he or she can withdraw the money earlier. Medical account money is allocated for the depositor's healthcare expenses.

"Such a system can be successfully adapted in Kazakhstan's conditions. Such an integrated approach will be able to meet the interests of all parties, including the state, which can legalise the shadow economy, and employers for whom the tax burden on the wage fund will decrease. And, in this case, employees will receive a full-fledged tool to solve their social issues. Plus, they will accumulate funds for their retirement," said Centre for Strategic Initiatives Project Director Bakhytzhon Sarkeev.

...as another expert says pension system should be reformed using Singaporean model

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh pension system should be reformed using the Singapore model, said Centre for Strategic Development senior partner Olzhas Khudaibergenov Nov. 20 during the second Strategic Initiatives Forum.

"Recently, a ranking of the best pension systems was published. If you take the top 10 countries, their pension systems assume that when transitioning (to that system), the tax burden will increase by two to two and a-half times. Naturally, we cannot afford this and only the Singapore model allows you to save the tax burden and even slightly reduce it," he said.

He noted the Singapore system is connected with housing provision, economic growth and employment, which makes it particularly attractive.

"These are issues of housing provision for the population and economic growth and employment; all issues are solved together. It should be noted that Singapore is number one in the world in terms of competitiveness and the only country in the world that has



Centre for Strategic Development senior partner Olzhas Khudaibergenov.

no external debt," he added. Khudaibergenov emphasised changes to the pension system would entail changes to the tax system.

"In Singapore, let's say, they have their own United National Pension Fund (UAPF), which performs the functions of the UAPF, National Social Insurance Fund and the National Pension Payment Centre. They have one structure. Therefore, we may need to change something with our system. Also, in our case this will cause changes in the tax system. In Singapore, there are two types of contributions – there is an individual income tax and a pension contribution. There are no other types of taxes and the total tax

burden on the wage fund is 10-20 percent lower than ours. There, the system is made in such a way that a person can manage his savings for housing, education and medicine and, of course, then it no longer refers to the pension contribution as taxes," he said.

He recommended changing the Kazakh system in favour of the Singapore model and is hopeful President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev will consider this choice.

"Now, our proposals are proposals from the expert sector. I hope the President considers this option and makes a decision. In terms of preparation, this will require a year, maximum two. Until a new version of the pension system is launched, housing reform can be launched and two years later launched with adaptation to Kazakhstan at 10 percent on the housing bill. Yes, these are approximate calculations. In fact, in Singapore, rates vary depending on the age of the person. The older the person, the lower the rate. This has a side effect that it becomes beneficial for the employer to keep the person if he is aging. Their model brilliantly reflects all the needs and capabilities of people," he added.

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EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan's Permanent Mission to the United Nations hosted a roundtable Dec. 5 on the country's experience in repatriating its citizens from conflict zones and their reintegration into society, reported the MFA press service. The event gathered nearly 130 UN member state, international non-governmental organisation and UN specialised agency representatives. Kazakhstan returned 595 of its citizens from Syria, including 400 children, from January-June through the Jusan (Bitter Wormwood) operation and recently returned 14 children from Iraq. "Jusan operation is more than a humanitarian mission, but an internationally recognised counterterrorism strategy. We prevent further radicalisation of citizens through their rehabilitation and reintegration," said Deputy Foreign Minister Yerzhan Ashikbayev, addressing the gathering. He thanked the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Committee of the Red Cross and American and Iraqi officials for their contributions to the operation. Specialised psychologists and theologians continue to work with the returned citizens.

Kuwait's Jazeera Airways and Malaysian Air Asia X will start flying to Kazakhstan in 2020 as part of the country's open skies regime launched Nov. 1 at its 11 airports, reported the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development press service. Negotiations were held during the twelfth International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Air Services Negotiation Event (ICAN 2019), the world's premier platform to build partnerships and conduct air services negotiations, hosted Dec. 2-6 in Aqaba, Jordan. Jazeera Airways will launch its first flight this summer as part of the agreement between Kazakh and Kuwaiti aviation officials. Both countries' airlines will operate 14 flights per week and an unlimited number of cargo flights with fifth freedom rights. Air Asia X will start flying to Kazakhstan in the second quarter. The open skies regime covers airports in Aktau, Almaty, Karaganda, Kokshetau, Nur-Sultan, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, Semei, Shymkent, Taraz, and Ust-Kamenogorsk without frequency restrictions and with fifth freedom rights. The authorities have also announced that Austrian and Kazakh airlines are given opportunities to increase the number of regular flights to 21 per week (currently, there are no such flights).

Kazakhstan participated in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Ministerial Council Dec. 5-6 in Bratislava, Slovakia, reported the MFA press service. The meeting gathered foreign ministers and senior diplomats from the 57 OSCE participating states to review the organisation's activities and bolster dialogue on security issues in the OSCE area. The Kazakh delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Roman Vassilenko, who in his remarks noted the relevance of ideas and principles written in the organisation's Astana Declaration adopted in 2010 at the OSCE summit in the Kazakh capital. He emphasised the importance of an inclusive dialogue and coordinated actions of OSCE participating states to react and prevent conflict situations. Attendees were also briefed on Kazakhstan's initiatives to support Afghanistan, including the October roundtable in Nur-Sultan organised by the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, the Slovak chairmanship of the OSCE and the OSCE Secretariat.

Astana Opera principal dancer Aigerim Beketayeva received the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Commonwealth of Debuts international youth award Dec. 9 in Brest, Belarus, a CIS 2019 Culture Capital. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia and Tajikistan nominated 26 individuals and the international jury selected eight winners, whose achievements have provided a significant contribution to developing and promoting different arts.

Tokayev, Zheenbekov hold talks on wide-ranging cooperation, EAEU in Bishkek

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev paid an official visit to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Nov. 27 for negotiations with Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Zheenbekov.

"We strive to find and develop new areas of joint work that are consistent with the spirit and nature of Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan relations," Tokayev said after speaking with Zheenbekov, according to 24.kg.

Regarding the content of the negotiations, Zheenbekov noted that the development of cultural cooperation and interactions within the Eurasian Economic Union were at the heart of the discussion.

"Particular attention was paid to cultural cooperation between our two fraternal countries, having a common history, language, religion and traditions. We agreed that it is necessary to cooperate more actively in this area. We also discussed issues of interaction within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. During the talks, an exchange of views took place on pressing regional and international issues," he said.

In particular, he proposed in the



L-R: Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Sooronbay Zheenbekov.

near future to organise reciprocal Days of Culture, which were held more than six years ago.

Tokayev described Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as allies in good harmony.

"Kyrgyzstan is a good neighbour, a fraternal state and an ally for Kazakhstan. We have a common vision, similar views on the development of the situation on many topical issues on the international agenda," said Tokayev, according to 24.kg.

He also noted that Kazakhstan has signed more agreements and treaties with Kyrgyzstan than with any other country. "A solid juridical base has been formed between

our countries, numbering about 180 treaties and agreements. There are other important institutions where we constructively discuss and find solutions to all issues of mutual interest. Kazakhstan does not have such a comprehensive institutionalisation of bilateral relations with any other state."

He drew the attention of journalists to bilateral documents signed at the end of the talks, highlighting the Comprehensive Cooperation Programme that should give a significant impetus to strengthening the partnership between the two states.

Zheenbekov expressed satisfaction with the negotiations. "The Kyrgyz side is pleased

with the results of the negotiations, and I would like to note the fruitful continuation of our cooperation," he said, according to 24.kg.

Tokayev said during the talks a major emphasis was made on trade and economic relations of two countries, as well as investment links.

"Bilateral trade from 2015 to 2018 increased by 30 percents and amounted to about \$900 millions. As a result, today our country is one of the leading trade partners of Kyrgyzstan, firmly occupying the third position after Russia and China. In turn, Kyrgyzstan is Kazakhstan's second trading partner among the countries of Central Asia," said Tokayev, according to akorda.kz.

Tokayev said one of the goals of the cooperation is to increase the trade turnover up to \$1 billion. The two leaders discussed the possibility of launching a networking space where the entrepreneurs of two countries could make connections.

"One of the possible options could be the introduction of the practice of holding inter-regional forums of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Governments have been entrusted with working out this proposal," said Tokayev.

To support export and import

operations, Tokayev offered to create a logistics centre.

"To support and stimulate export-import operations, Kazakhstan proposed creating a logistics centre for the design and processing of goods. The implementation of the project will greatly facilitate administrative procedures and the movement of goods across our countries," he said.

Another central topic was the water management in the region.

The Kyrgyz president also noted that the volume of trade between the neighbouring nations grew in 2019.

"We noted with satisfaction the increase in the volume of mutual trade between our countries. Compared to last year, the indicator grew by 10.5 percent. The number of Kyrgyz-Kazakh joint ventures has grown to 1,900. This result can serve as the basis for new successes in the economy."

Before the negotiations, Zheenbekov met Tokayev and the Kazakh delegation at the Manas-2 airport in Bishkek. The two presidents then visited the late Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov museum house and the Ata-Beyit Kyrgyz ethno-memorial complex, where they put flowers on Aitmatov's grave.

Tokayev offers special conditions to German investors

Continued from Page A1

"China and Russia are great neighbours of Kazakhstan. We know the One Belt, One Road initiative. Therefore, we have every reason as Europeans, as Germans, to perceive you in Central Asia as a key participant in economic processes, and also to actively participate in the development of this region ourselves," she noted.

During their talks, Tokayev and Merkel focused on developing economic cooperation, as well as partnerships in science and cultural work.

"Today's talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier were held at a high level. I am sure they will give a new impetus to the development of bilateral cooperation," Tokayev said of their exchange.

During the Berlin Eurasia Club event, Tokayev noted the importance of Kazakh-German cooperation in Kazakh-European relations.

"We pay great attention to what is happening in Europe. We are

engaged in a constant constructive dialogue with European leaders. Kazakhstan will continue to support new EU approaches towards the Central Asian region. It is obvious that in our interaction with Europe, for many reasons, a special place is occupied by economic, historical, cultural relations with Germany," said Tokayev.

Among the perks of working with Kazakhstan, Tokayev highlighted the benefits of Kazakhstan's integration with its Central Asian neighbours that allows German companies easy access to Central Asian markets.

"Our close integration with our neighbours provides convenient access to neighbouring markets. More than 500 million people live today in the immediate vicinity of our borders. Within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, we want to benefit from four freedoms – the movement of goods, services, capital and labour. We will continue to work closely with our closest neighbours in Central Asia. Therefore, German companies that are already present in Kazakhstan will

have the opportunity to enter new markets for them."

Tokayev expressed his hopes for the cooperation in information technologies, which is a sector Kazakhstan is developing.

"We have adopted a special state programme, "Digital Kazakhstan". The Fraunhofer Institute from Germany participated in the development of this strategic programme. In order to support start-ups from all over our region, we organised the Astana Hub and the IT University. We hope that in three years we will have a pool of talents in the field of information technology. In general, we are ready for cooperation in the area of digitisation both at the level of government structures and at the level of individual companies," said Tokayev.

During his visit to Germany, Tokayev also held a business dinner with German business executives, as a stated aim of his trip was to diversify Kazakhstan's portfolio of investors.

"As the President of Kazakhstan, I will do everything in my power to ensure that business and investments from Germany come

to our country, feel safe and successfully develop. We are ready to provide special conditions for German business people," he told the group.

Tokayev emphasised Kazakhstan's location as an asset for companies interested in transporting goods from China to Europe.

"We have very good relations with China, Russia and the countries of Central Asia," he stressed. "We are an important transport hub between east and west. Over 70 percent of all transcontinental routes pass through Kazakhstan. The international Western Europe-Western China transit corridor makes it possible to reduce the time of transportation of goods. This year, a record speed was reached for the transportation of goods from the Chinese city of Xi'an to Germany; the transportation time was only 10 days."

Leading German concerns including Volkswagen, Mann, Siemens, Knaf, Bayer and Metro are already actively working in Kazakhstan, the president noted, calling for more German businesses to join in the implementation of

projects in agriculture, high technology and digitisation, as well as take part in the work of the Astana International Financial Centre.

"It was a great honour for us to speak with you. We are confident that your visit will fruitfully affect not only our political contacts, but also our economic ties," said head of the Wilo company and chair of the Eastern Committee of the German Economy, Oliver Hermes, at the Berlin Eurasia Club event on Dec. 6. "I want to assure you that German business as a whole is a reliable partner of Kazakhstan. I believe that we have good opportunities for future cooperation and the growth of German investments in the economy of Kazakhstan."

During Tokayev's visit to Germany, representatives of the Kazakh Development Bank signed cooperation agreements with such German banks as Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, KfW IPEX-Bank. A memorandum of understanding was also signed with German insurance company Euler Hermes Aktiengesellschaft while a number of commercial agreements were signed as well.

Country repatriates 14 children from Iraq

Continued from Page A1

The humanitarian mission is part of the nation's efforts to return its citizens from territories formerly controlled by terrorists. It follows the four stages of the Jusan (Bitter Wormwood) operation conducted from January through June that returned nearly 600 citizens, approximately 400 of whom were children, from Syria.

"Most of those kids who we brought back from Syria went to school or kindergarten. Their mothers were employed. The majority of the 150 women that we took back returned to the secular way of life and rejected the radical ideology. We have good examples of the women that started working at rehabilitation centres and have convinced the remaining women to come back to their families. There are still some problems with some women. Psychologists and theologians are working with them, convincing them that it is a pseudo state," the diplomat added referring to DAESH.

The trial process is ongoing in relation to the men who have been charged with terrorist activity involvement and returned to Kazakhstan from Syria.

It was not only a "right action for Kazakhstan to return its citizens, but also very timely," said Advisor to the President of Kazakhstan Erlan Karin who also personally participated in the evacuation of the children.

The situation in the Middle East, he noted, has drastically changed

this year, including the escalation of the conflict in northern Syria which significantly complicates efforts by other countries to extricate their citizens from there.

"The government takes its role with responsibility despite the circumstances [under which] the citizens ended up there. Kazakhstan is

probably the only country that in such scale and stages consequently undertook these measures to return citizens both from Syria and Iraq. Other states also do it, but on a smaller scale," he told The Astana Times.

"Our diplomats conducted huge work, both in Jusan and in this op-



eration. They did the bulk of the work, because they had to clear up different issues with our foreign partners in difficult political conditions. This was a not so visible and not so noticeable amount of work," he added.

The Kazakh government used different channels to find children trapped in conflict areas and stranded in camps.

"The information across all channels is being accumulated. Relatives contact parents themselves through different ways to try to contact and seek help in their repatriation or that of their kids," said Karin.

A tangle of concerns needed to be addressed to conduct such an operation, he noted.

"It took a long time. First of all, many may think that the issue is just in sending the plane and bringing the kids, but actually there is a need to address legal issues. Children who are being returned from Iraq, their parents are sentenced and many of them lack documents. The legal status of minors is unclear. Therefore, our diplomats and other state bodies needed to resolve all legal issues and prepare the documents," he added.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Government plans to urbanise 62 percent of population by 2025

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – In the new State Programme for the Development of Regions for 2020-2025, the Kazakh government set the goal of urbanising 62 percent of the country's population. This should improve social welfare, Minister of National Economy Ruslan Dalenov said during his report at a Dec. 3 government meeting.

The next five-year programme prioritises developing urban growth centres. It identifies four large metropolitan areas (Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Aktobe and Shymkent), 14 regional urbanised areas and 18 bigger remote villages to focus on.

"Within the framework of the Strategy of Kazakhstan 2050 and the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan by 2025, the priority of regional policy is to ensure managed

urbanisation. The new programme defines important institutional conditions for the development of the country. This is the formation of centres of economic growth, increasing the competitiveness of regions, ensuring a basic standard of living in all regions," Dalenov explained.

The programme will combine existing state programmes, territorial development programmes, comprehensive plans and strategies. The government wants to concentrate labour and financial resources.

This synergy should increase markets for rural producers, boost non-resource-based gross domestic product (GDP) and improve transport connectivity. The programme also includes infrastructure development projects in cities, district centres and villages.

"Urbanisation will give an additional GDP growth of 0.52 percent. Regional imbalances will be

reduced. Real cash incomes of the population will grow 25 percent. The main result of the programme will be an increase in the welfare of citizens living in cities, regional centres and villages," said Dalenov.

The programme will combine existing state programmes, territorial development programmes, comprehensive plans and strategies. The government wants to concentrate labour and financial resources.

As part of the Auyt-El Besigi project, the programme will modernise 3,477 villages – 90 percent of all Kazakh villages, where almost seven million people live. The programme intends to create access to high-quality drinking water and improve transport links between the villages and their nearest regional centres. The

government plans to allocate 1.3 trillion tenge (US\$3.38 billion) to develop villages.

The programme will also introduce a regional standard system.

As a result of the first five-year plan ending in 2019, the

According to the minister, 17,000 specialists received preferential budget loans for the purchase of housing under the Diplommen Auytga (With a Diploma to a Village) programme. The programme finished 8,000 rural improvement projects, improving infrastructure in villages for 700,000 villagers. The Kazakh government allocated 252 billion tenge (US\$655.78 million) to these projects.

In addition, 1.4 trillion tenge (US\$3.64 billion) has been allocated for the development of engineering infrastructure since 2014, Dalenov said.

Kazakhstan has 17 regions with 87 cities and 6,500 villages. The level of urbanisation across the country is 58.2 percent, the highest urbanisation level among the countries of Central Asia, but still lower than in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, where it is 77 percent.

Experts suggest Kazakhstan limit external debts

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Experts suggested at the recent Strategic Initiatives Forum in Nur-Sultan that Kazakhstan should cease relying on external debts.

"We suggest there is a need for active investment policies. Our previous capital amnesties were formally successful, but there are still many assets abroad, which can be returned. At the same time,

while transitioning to new economic policy, we should abolish external debts," said Senior Partner at the Centre for Strategic Initiatives Olzhas Khudaibergenov.

Implementation of state projects, he noted, can be done without involving external debts.

"We can afford it, particularly given the funds the National Fund possesses. We have a project to finance the construction of customs clearance check points, which was done with the external loans. This

is a completely wrong option. We should not use external loans for this, or for state purposes," he said.

Presidential Administration Deputy Head Timur Suleimenov, former Minister of National Economy, voiced the opposite.

"At zero percent of external debt. I believe that this idea has a right to exist, but in my opinion as long as we are balanced in terms of assets and liabilities of the state and by asset we mean not only the budget but also the National Fund, we have quite

a normal situation. I am not saying to actively use the National Fund, because it is within 3-4 percent and we borrow at slightly higher rates of 5-6 percent. We can take advantage from this," said Suleimenov.

He said external loans should serve as a driver.

"It (external debt) is not very big right now. It is around 23 percent. This is quite a safe level. The total debt of the country is 86 percent. As you may remember, it was above 105-107 percent. The gross domestic product is

growing, the debt is not growing a lot, therefore, we are good in terms of percentage value," he said.

The forum was organised by the Centre for Strategic Initiatives and gathered experts, policy makers and heads of national companies and state bodies to explore the development of a new economic policy, modernisation of the Kazakh pension system and the Kazakh banking sector. The government will consider the recommendations and proposals made by experts at the forum.

Kazakhstan inks agreements with Tyson Foods, Valmont Industries



L-R: Chairman of the Board of Tyson Foods John Tyson, Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin and Tyson Foods President and CEO Noel White.



Photo credit: Primeminister.kz

Continued from Page A1

"The opening of the enterprise will stimulate not only the development of the meat industry, but also other related sectors of the agro-industrial complex – veterinary medicine, agricultural machinery, fodder crops, the creation of feedlots, et cetera. The project will create tens of thousands of new jobs in Kazakhstan's agriculture," he added.

For Tyson, the plant is in keeping with its plans to expand its international enterprises, which bring in

just 3 percent of its annual revenue of \$42.4 billion. Kazakhstan's strategic geographic location and well-developed transportation networks are among the key factors that drew Tyson Foods to invest in Kazakhstan, Tyson Chief Executive Noel White told The Financial Times.

"This initiative is to help satisfy that growth in demand that we see over the course of the next 10-plus years," he said. Kazakh farmers will have access to information and consulting services, which also include on-the-job training and vocational training.

Founded in 1935, Tyson Foods processes more than 20,000 head per day and employs 141,000 people. Mamin visited Tyson's production, technological process, and research and development facilities in Springdale, Arkansas, and Dakota City, Nebraska.

The prime minister also travelled to Omaha and met with Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts and Valmont Industries President and CEO Stephen Kaniewski. Valmont is the global market leader in irrigation systems.

The Kazakh Ministry of Ag-

riculture, Kusto Group and Valmont Industries signed an agreement to collaborate to improve agricultural productivity in Kazakhstan.

The document envisaged building a plant to produce Valley Pivot Irrigation Machines in Kazakhstan in 2022. The plant will have a capacity of 1,000 frontal and circular irrigation machines per year. The American irrigation technologies should increase crop productivity and halve agricultural costs.

The parties plan to expand

the plant's capacity and produce equipment for telecommunications, renewable energy and infrastructure construction.

Kazakhstan plans to increase its irrigated land from 1.4 million to 2 million hectares by 2022, and to 3 million hectares by 2030, said Mamin.

"The use of advanced technologies by Valmont Industries will have a multiplier effect on crop production and the creation of a forage base for livestock production," he said, primeminister.kz reports.

Light industry boosts production by 18.9 percent in 2019

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The volume of production of light industry products in Kazakhstan increased by 18.9 percent over the first 10 months of this year compared to the same period in 2018 and amounted to 87.5 billion tenge (US\$227 million), the press service of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development said Nov. 19.

"Growth of 23.7 percent is ob-

served in the production of textiles and of 7.5 percent in the production of clothes. Today, light industry is a priority area that receives great attention from the state. This industry includes more than 20 sub-sectors, which are combined into three main groups: the textile industry makes up 52 percent, clothing production, 38 percent, and leather and related products, 10 percent," the ministry representative said about the industry.

Kazakh light industry produces

both commercial goods and goods for national services.

"Kazakhstan's light industry enterprises produce work clothes for national companies and healthcare institutions; special uniforms for the armed forces, police and other bodies; as well as products for the population. These are outerwear – coats, men's suits, hosiery, children's clothing, hats, home textiles and shoes. In addition, domestic enterprises produce cotton yarn and fabrics, blended fabrics, carpets, leather," the representative explained.

In 2018, five new projects were commissioned, including two in the territory of the Ontustyk special economic zone with a total investment of 7.3 billion tenge (US\$19 million), thus creating 423 jobs. Those include the production of processing polyethylene terephthalate (PET) waste and the production of staple fibre, knitted women's tights, towels, bathrobes, shoes and hay-knitting threads. In 2019, the Bal Textile project, the third workshop producing carpets and rugs, was commissioned for

1 billion tenge (US\$2.6 million), creating 45 new jobs.

Currently, support for light industry enterprises is provided by the Kazakh government as part of systemic measures to develop the manufacturing industry, such as promoting the export of products, stimulating increased labour productivity, promoting goods on the domestic market, implementing the Unified Business Support and Development Programme of the Business Road Map 2020 and other programmes.

ECONOMIC NEWS IN BRIEF

In the first nine months of 2019, Kazakh National Fund's assets reached \$59.34 billion, a 2.3-percent increase year-on-year (yoy). The assets reached a 34-percent share of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018, exceeding the 30-percent minimum balance level. In early August, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed a decree pursuing a policy to diversify the assets. To increase long-term expected returns, the savings portfolio transitioned from a conservative distribution (80 percent bonds, 20 percent shares) to a balanced distribution (60 percent bonds, 30 percent shares, up to 5 percent alternative instruments and up to 5 percent gold).

From January-October, fixed asset investments in art, entertainment and leisure reached a record 118.9 billion tenge (US\$309.27 million), a 53.5-percent increase year-on-year (yoy) and 1.2 percent share of all fixed asset investments. One-quarter of the investments are in Nur-Sultan. The top three regions, which also include the East Kazakhstan and Almaty regions, account for almost 59 percent of all investments in the field. A noticeable increase in the investment portfolio resulted from a 93.5-percent increase (up to 54 billion tenge (US\$140.46 million)) in own fund investments, 45.4 percent of the total volume of capital investments in the field.

As of October, 436,500 small companies are registered in Kazakhstan, a 2.3-percent increase year-on-year (yoy). The number of operating companies increased 10.1 percent to 294,000. Accordingly, the share of small operating enterprises from registered companies increased from 62.6 percent to 67.4 percent. The number of operating small businesses has increased in all regions, with Nur-Sultan showing the most noticeable growth of 15.1 percent to 49,300. The Turkestan Region and Shymkent had the highest growth rates of 14.5 percent and 14.4 percent, respectively.

At the end of October, Kazakh second-tier banks loaned 257.8 billion tenge (US\$670.56 million) to agricultural entities compared to 495.1 billion tenge (US\$1.29 billion) in 2018. The Almaty Region provided almost half (48 percent) of the loans, followed by the Akmola (25 billion tenge (US\$65.03 million)) and Kostanai (23.1 billion tenge (US\$60.09 million)) regions. The loan reduction was caused by the banks' high average lending rate (12 percent and higher) and stringent requirements on borrowers' collateral base. Small enterprises comprised the largest share (97.5 percent) of agricultural borrowers during the ten-month period.

In the first ten months of the year, metal ore mining reached 1.6 trillion tenge (US\$4.16 billion) and the industrial production index was 115.8 percent (104.6 percent in 2018). In 2018, metal ore production value was slightly less than 1.5 trillion tenge (US\$3.90 billion). Non-ferrous metals accounted for more than 78 percent of total production. The Kostanai Region led in metal ore production with 378.6 billion tenge (US\$984.78 million), of which 309.4 billion tenge (US\$804.8 million) was iron ore and 69.2 billion tenge (US\$179.99 million) non-ferrous metals. The East Kazakhstan Region, the second biggest producer, extracted 334.4 billion tenge (US\$869.81 million) in non-ferrous metal ores. The Aktobe Region closed the top three with 247.5 billion tenge (US\$643.77 million), of which 242.8 billion tenge (US\$631.55 million) is non-ferrous metals and 4.6 billion tenge (US\$11.96 million) iron ores.

The Kazakh National Bank recently maintained the base rate at 9.25 percent per annum while maintaining the interest rate band at +/- 1. Annual inflation is below the expectations of the National Bank. Real GDP growth is gradually accelerating. Given the current decision on the base rate, inflation is expected to develop within the target corridor of 4-6 percent for 2019-2020. Further decisions on the base rate will be made considering internal and external risks, which will determine the level of actual inflation and its compliance with the targets.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan will gradually abandon plastic bags, reported informburo.kz. Retail chains will be required to charge their customers for standard plastic bags with a density of less than 20 microns. In addition, the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources will introduce a recycling fee on plastic packaging manufacturers and importers and there is also the possibility of a sales ban on plastic bags after 2025. The ministry, the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs and the Association of Environmental Organisations signed a memorandum Sept. 20 to engage in a phased reduction in plastic container turnover. Large chains such as Anvar, Kenmart, Magnum and Small are ready to join the initiative.

Ricoh, a Japanese multinational imaging and electronics company, opened a new office Nov. 26 in Almaty, reported profit.kz. The company has been working in Kazakhstan for more than six years. Ricoh Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Sales Department head Andrei Burkin said the company's success in Kazakhstan is largely due to the work of its partners, adding the nation is its number one country in the region. In 2013, the company began its CIS activities in Almaty. The new office will enhance Ricoh's work with partners and customers and organise the work of the official representative office that will cover the entire Central Asian region.

Kazakhtelecom, the largest provider of digital services in Kazakhstan, and Russian multidisciplinary IT structure IKS Holding signed a memorandum of cooperation and joint activities during the Big Data in Kazakhstan: New Horizons international conference held Nov. 28 in Nur-Sultan, reported profit.kz. According to the document, the parties will establish strategic relations and combine their accumulated experience in processing, storing, structuring and analysing Big Data to develop Kazakhstan's digital economy.

Chocofamily Holding bought Aviatka, an online airplane and railway ticket booking service. Chocofamily, with its similar service Chocotravel, now holds 100 percent of the shares in the country's travel services, reported profit.kz Nov. 20. Aviatka founders Alexei Lee and Evgeny Matveev sold their shares and will focus on developing their own projects and investing in start-ups. The united travel company continues to grow faster than the market, increasing its turnover 2.7 times to 1.5 billion tenge (US\$ 3.9 million) per month in 18 months. The company sells more than 330,000 air and train tickets per month.

QazTech Ventures held the first general meeting of business incubator founders, where they finalised the need to create an association of Kazakh business incubators, reported profit.kz Nov. 27. The idea was raised a while ago, as no permanent platform currently exists for communication among them. The purpose will be to develop a unified business incubation and acceleration methodology and conceptual framework, consolidate the competencies of all existing players in the Kazakh market and accelerate developing the business incubation system as a whole.

Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs Deputy Chairperson of the Board Rustam Zhursunov proposed Nov. 29 attracting citizens' pension savings and commercial bank funds placed in notes in the country's central bank to long-term business lending, reported kursiv.kz. Financial reserves in National Bank and Unified Accumulative Pension Fund (UAPF) notes can become a source of long money and should contribute to structural changes in the economy, including for financing the real sector through public-private partnership mechanisms, he said.

Air Astana completes first Airbus A320neo C-check at Almaty Airport base

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh national carrier Air Astana completed its first independent C-check of an Airbus A320neo aircraft, a base maintenance check, at Almaty Airport base, reported the company's press service.

The company's primary goal is to minimise costs by independently performing heavy aircraft maintenance, said Vice President for Maintenance and Engineering Keith Wardle.

"With the expansion of our experience and capability, we also see the possibility of carrying out maintenance for external customers. This, in turn, will increase revenue and offset part of the cost of performing our own C-checks. We expect this to happen in the coming years," he added.

In October, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) certified the company to perform the advanced maintenance. The certificate allows Air Astana to do heavy maintenance (C-check) on Airbus A319/A320/A321 aircraft.



Photo credit: Air Astana

The check was completed in 10 days by S7 Technics specialists and Air Astana engineers and support teams who conducted more than 170 safety checks and cabin restoration. The engineers previously participated in training at the S7 Technics base in Moscow.

"In the history of S7 Technics, this is the first such project, but there are examples in the aviation industry when a provider helps a customer develop their own competencies. For an airline of the scale of Air Astana, the development of its own competencies in

the field of basic maintenance is not a whim, but a logical step to reduce costs," said S7 Technics Deputy General Director for Marketing and Sales Igor Panshin.

Last year, Air Astana and S7 Technics signed a memorandum of understanding to establish C-

check maintenance at the carrier's bases in Almaty and Nur-Sultan, according to the release. S7 Technics provides consulting services and training for airline specialists to expand their repair capabilities. The partnership involves sharing and exchanging tools and equipment between the Air Astana maintenance and S7 Technics bases.

Air Astana will significantly increase its maintenance capability at the capital base in preparation for the first C-check there in 2020.

In November, Air Astana announced plans to launch an Almaty-Paris flight on long-range Airbus A321LRs beginning in June. The airline is the first in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to operate this type of aircraft. The flight, lasting seven hours 15 minutes and seven hours and 45 minutes on its return, will be completed three times a week on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

The cost of a round-trip ticket will vary from 191,765 tenge (US\$496) in economy class to 944,206 tenge (US\$2,440) in business class with associated fees.

HydroPlat project hopes to make hydrogen-powered cars more affordable

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – HydroPlat's team project, the Clean Mobility Award winner at the Climate-LaunchPad Global Grand Final Nov. 19, could potentially make hydrogen cars significantly cheaper, providing a sustainable and affordable vehicle option, said team leader Aidana Toleshova.

"Basically, we participated first in the national finals, which were held at Nazarbayev University. We became the winners of the national final and we had a chance to go to the grand final that took place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands... We were nominated beforehand for the clean mobility theme award. Clean mobility is about new technologies for transportation, reducing carbon

emissions. We won the award in our nomination," she said.

The idea came from the team's science project, as it decided to apply its findings to making hydrogen cars more accessible.

"The HydroPlat came from our science project and we wanted to first of all reduce the hydrogen sulphides from the waste waters. Afterwards we thought 'Ok, our bacteria can reduce the hydrogen sulphide, what can it do next?' We researched this topic with our professor. We thought we can turn them into nanomaterials, which can be used in the fuel cells, and fuel cells are used in hydrogen cars. Our nanomaterial is able to replace platinum catalysts in the fuel cell. This way we make the fuel cell a lot cheaper. Hydrogen cars are a lot better than even elec-

tric cars, but they are not popular because it's too expensive, and by using HydroPlat in hydrogen car manufacturing we'll be able to produce them at a cheaper price, which will make them more affordable," she added.

Hydrogen cars can potentially become an even better alternative to petroleum-fuelled cars than electric cars, as they recharge better.

"Because the carbon emissions budget is getting smaller and smaller every year, I think there

is a necessity to switch to non-petroleum fuel vehicles, which are either hydrogen cars or electric cars. Even though there are some electric cars, they are not going to last as much as hydrogen cars will, because hydrogen cars are better at recharging, so they can go a lot further. We think that in the future, even though it might seem impossible now, but in five years we'll be using hydrogen cars," said Toleshova.

The main demand in developing

the HydroPlat project was finding specialists.

"The challenge was in getting expert opinion, because in Kazakhstan we don't really have a lot of experts in the hydrogen energy field and hydrogen cars. It was very difficult for us to find people, so we had to have some expert opinions from overseas. It's not only local people who help us and advise us in our start-up," she noted.

The team's long-term plan is to establish a company that will be able to commercialise the project, said Toleshova.

"Our short-term plan is to test our nanomaterials in real hydrogen cars and our long-term plan is to establish our company and sell our nanomaterials," she added.

AIFC aims to improve educational technologies

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

NUR-SULTAN – The Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC) Bureau for Continuing Professional Development (BCPD) held an EdTech Camp Nov. 29 to improve the country's educational technologies through exchanging experience, applying the best international practices and expertise and creating a professional platform to develop educational innovations.

EdTech Camp brought together local and international experts, entrepreneurs and representatives of start-ups, industrial companies and the EdTech ecosystem interested in creating and digitising the educational system. The event focused on practical issues including attracting and fostering human capital, interacting with investors and promoting entrepreneurial initiatives, future education methods, technology transit, modern cases and business opportunities, as well as the prospects of developing EdTech in Kazakhstan and throughout the world.

IT, cyber security, change management, project activity, digitisation and technology specialists shared their experience and vision to grow the industry. The headliner of the event was Mikhail Sverdlov, content director of SkyEng, the leading online English language school in Russia and Europe, and founder and owner of successful Internet and B2B projects.

Workshops were also led by

QazAngels co-founder and CEO Ruslan Rakymbai, AIFC BCPD Deputy CEO Elmira Seidazimova, Seedstars Kazakhstan CEO Serik Shakarim, KPMG Digital Village leading expert Madiyar Toleugali and Microsoft Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Business Development and Education Manager Almas Moldakanov. All are AIFC BCPD partners in enhancing human capital, digitisation and educational technologies.

In addition to seminars by international experts, the EdTech founders shared their experience of operating within the AIFC BCPD/Seedstars Kazakhstan joint effort. The programme will be recruiting new members on a quarterly basis in 2020.

AIFC BCPD assists in the EdTech industry by responding to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where technology and people will be a single source of progress. By creating a professional community, the bureau actively supports EdTech's direction and provides various opportunities for its development in the country.

BCPD, a former AIFC department, subsequently became a subsidiary. It prepares for international professional certifications using the best global practices in continuing professional development to expand human resources and form a pool of worldwide professionals from local specialists to work in the AIFC eco-system and on the open market.



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EDITORIAL & OPINION

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Kazakh Independence Day also celebrates three decades of international partnerships

On Dec. 16, Kazakhstan once again celebrates its independence. Twenty-eight years ago, First President Nursultan Nazarbayev brought our nation into a new era. Thanks to the considerable efforts of many, Kazakhstan has developed into the leading economy of the region with a high profile on the global stage. Our nation must never lose sight of our foundations, both in what our people have achieved, but also in those international partners who have been so important to our story.

Rather than looking inwards, Kazakhstan's independence demonstrated a distinct approach to global politics, which saw Nursultan Nazarbayev forge lasting relationships with numerous international partners. Looking around the world, multilateralism is under more pressure than ever; conflict, tension and mistrust can be found on almost every continent. The world is currently facing some of the most uncertain times in its recent history. Now, more than ever, there is a demand for stability and diplomacy.

As we mark another Independence Day, we must take stock and recognise that Kazakhstan is strategically placed to suggest solutions to the world. Our nation sits at a global crossroads in the heart of Eurasia. We are a dynamic hub between Russia, China, the Middle East and Europe, at the centre of historic, current and future trade routes. From this key position, Kazakhstan has the potential to be the anchor of stability in a global storm.

Now, in the face of global divisions, we look to the future with the objective of global harmony. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is building on the First President's legacy. During his inauguration speech in June this year, the new President renewed Kazakhstan's commitment to a multi-vector foreign policy, with a view to unify not only the Eurasian region, but also global powers.

Nowhere else in the world is surrounded by such talk about neighbours. Over the last two decades, international media has been consumed by conflicts in near-by countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Yet Kazakhstan has provided meaningful contributions to stability of an often-divided region.

Through the efforts of the First President, we have the advantage of being Central Asia's most economically developed and prosperous nation. Yet with this privilege comes responsibility. As a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and as a founding member of the Eurasian Economic Union, Kazakhstan has a key role across global forums for dialogue and conflict resolution. For example, in 2017, Kazakhstan was given the honour of being the first Central Asian nation to be elected as a non-permanent mem-

ber of the UN Security Council. We used this to great effect, such as by hosting a ministerial debate focussing on the region's security and sustainable development. Kazakhstan's expanding diplomatic engagement can be seen by looking at our neighbours. We maintain continuously positive relations with China and the other major economies of Southeast Asia. Kazakhstan is often referred to as the "buckle on the belt" of the Belt and Road initiative, and our nation now accounts for 70 percent of land-based transit passing from China to Europe. This economic partnership continues to bolster our economy, creating thousands of jobs and a predicted addition of a percentage point to annual GDP by 2021. There is no clearer indication of the strength of our bilateral relations than President Xi Jinping's announcement of the Belt and Road initiative in Nur-Sultan in 2013.

Independence Day also offers an opportunity to remember the important relationship with our northern neighbour: Russia. As well as the longest continuous land border in the world, we also share many cultural similarities. Our intertwined histories enable close diplomatic and economic relations. This legacy lives on through our bilateral collaboration within the sphere of the fight against global terrorism. This cooperation is emblematic of our close partnerships around the world. In January 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump welcomed Nursultan Nazarbayev to the White House. In their joint press conference, Trump underscored the importance of the relationship between our countries. Like him, we are proud to note

that the United States was one of the first countries to recognise Kazakhstan's independence in 1991.

As we transition to a new decade, it is vital to underscore the importance of our close friendship with the European Union. On June 17, the European Union adopted a new strategy for Central Asia with the priority of strengthening ongoing dialogue and multilateral cooperation. We now look forward to 2020 to realise this vision. This will particularly support closer ties within the sphere of economic cooperation, with the European Union being our largest trade partner.

Every year we mark our independence with a day of celebration, a milestone to remember how far our nation has come and to acknowledge our future direction. In 2019, friendship and trust between countries both near and far are as important as they have ever been. On Dec. 16, we give thanks for 28 years of an independent Kazakhstan with our friends near and far.

As we mark another Independence Day, we must take stock and recognise that Kazakhstan is strategically placed to suggest solutions to the world. Our nation sits at a global crossroads in the heart of Eurasia. We are a dynamic hub between Russia, China, the Middle East and Europe, at the centre of historic, current and future trade routes. From this key position, Kazakhstan has the potential to be the anchor of stability in a global storm.

Now, in the face of global divisions, we look to the future with the objective of global harmony. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is building on the First President's legacy. During his inauguration speech in June this year, the new President renewed Kazakhstan's commitment to a multi-vector foreign policy, with a view to unify not only the Eurasian region, but also global powers.

New Hungarian envoy in Nur-Sultan continues strong relations

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Newly-appointed Hungarian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Antal Heizer is continuing the embassy's work to strengthen political, economic and cultural cooperation between the nations.

"The relations between our countries are really excellent. Kazakhstan at this moment is the only strategic partner of Hungary in Central Asia and Hungary is the only such partner in Central Europe for Kazakhstan, so it is a good basis for cooperation. We try to develop relationships with other countries of the region, but we are a little bit more advanced with Kazakhstan," he said in an exclusive interview with The Astana Times.

Heizer assumed his post in September and presented his credentials to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev Nov. 11. He has served as an ambassador since 2006, working in Slovakia and Albania. Before coming to Kazakhstan, he was director of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Territorial Department, which also deals with Central Asia.

"Our job, the job of the diplomats and the job of the business circle now, is to concretise the political level of cooperation on certain projects, on trade, economics and investments. Cultural and social cooperation is a little more difficult, because they require financial support," he noted.

The leaders of both nations meet frequently. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visited Kazakhstan last spring. Shortly afterwards, a strategic council meeting in the capital was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Mihály Varga. Top-level visits happen often, especially among the ministers of foreign affairs, and the Hungarian prime minister had the opportunity to meet First Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, at the Turkish Council Summit in Baku, Azerbaijan in October. Heizer hopes that next year Kazakh leaders will visit Hungary.

Hungary has made large investments in Kazakhstan and its oil company MOL have long been present in Western Kazakhstan. The embassy's aim is also to bring Hungarian products to Kazakhstan and the former Soviet Union, where the country's agriculture is well-known.

"I think there is a space here to bring Hungarian agriculture products and food. We are active in other fields as well, but I think the focus should be on agriculture, not only on the export and import level, but also in investments," said Heizer.

Financial cooperation will soon be evident, as Hungary will take an active part in the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC). The country will be opening a representative office of Hungarian bank EXIM and other financial organisations are interested in becoming involved. He noted financial coordination is important because it will demonstrate to Hungarian businesspeople the benefits of having the nation's banks present in Kazakhstan. The banks will give guarantees and ease the loan process.

Heizer noted Kazakh-Hungarian cooperation is based on ancient relations between the nations, as scientific research has shown that Hungarian tribes came from the Central Asian region. The relative ties among Hungarian, as well as Kazakh, Kipchak, Kyrgyz and other Turkic nations is the focus of



L-R: Ambassador Antal Heizer and President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

scientific research and politics.

In addition to bilateral relations, Hungary's observer status in the Turkic Council is a new element of possible cooperation. The embassy works to cooperate with the International Turkic Academy in the capital by organising common programmes and this involvement also provides cultural and parliamentary dimensions. A representative bureau of the Turkic Council recently opened in Budapest. Hungary invited diplomats from each member nation to visit this bureau, including Kazakhstan, who will cooperate with their Hungarian colleagues on different projects. They also plan to cooperate with the TURKSOY, the International Organisation of Turkic Culture.

"I think there is a space here to bring Hungarian agriculture products and food. We are active in other fields as well, but I think the focus should be on agriculture, not only on the export and import level, but also in investments."

Hungary has opened a Stipendium Hungaricum programme for foreign students in an effort to promote humanitarian and cultural cooperation. Kazakhstan was one of the first partners to join the system. Hungary provides Kazakh students with 250 scholarships every year, which generate inquiries from more than 1,000 applicants. The application process is open till mid-January and Heizer is hopeful the interest will not diminish. The Erasmus+ programme is also available for study in Hungary.

"This group of young people who are already in Budapest or who will go there in the future will

be a new basis of our cooperation. They will work in financial, economic, political or cultural fields and will be the contact people between our two countries. It is a long-term investment from the Hungarian side. We hope the interest of Hungarian students towards Kazakhstan will also rise," he said.

The Kazakh embassy in Hungary is also helping with cultural and humanitarian projects, periodically gathering culturally active students in different Hungarian cities for singing, dancing and participating in the Hungarian life.

The geographic distance between the nations makes cooperation slightly more difficult, but Wizzair direct flights, which opened in 2017, help to connect different large groups.

"What I see on a Wizzair flight are young people travelling, going there and back. They are going as tourists and students and they are returning. In the future, I think this young generation will do a lot for our bilateral cooperation," said Heizer.

The embassies were involved in organisation of a Visegrad tourist show in the capital and Almaty and the Visegrad nations – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – seek to bring tourists from Central Asia in an organised manner to visit Central Europe.

"Hungarian citizens might come as tourists. For them, it is easier to travel to Kazakhstan because of the no visa system, for which we are very grateful. I hope that tourist cooperation will grow," he added.

The Hungarian ambassador is also responsible for relations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and Heizer needs to complete the accreditation process in those nations. He is still becoming accustomed to Kazakhstan and its cold winters, but is already looking forward to exploring the region and travelling with his wife.

Hungary has two offices in Kazakhstan, the embassy in the capital and the general consulate in Almaty, both of which are active and charged with facilitating cooperation and creating contacts.

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The Astana Times

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BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Baiterek Holding creates favourable investment climate, suggests ways to minimise risks in market

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Baiterek National Managing Holding attracts investments by ensuring support to foreign investors from the initial stages of project development through implementation, Baiterek Chair Aidar Arifkhanov told The Astana Times in an exclusive interview.

Baiterek is the Kazakh government's key financial agent responsible for the country's diversification and sustainable economic growth. It manages 11 state development institutions, financial organisations and national companies. The holding attracted approximately \$2.95 billion in foreign investment from 2016 to the first half of 2019.

The company's main focus is establishing "mutually beneficial relations with international financial organisations, banks, investment funds and international companies," noted Arifkhanov. It strives to help foreign investors



Baiterek Chair Aidar Arifkhanov.

"in every possible way" in entering the Kazakh market.

"The holding is represented in working groups to improve the investment climate and promote exports. Annually, an action plan to attract investments of the holding group of companies is formed," he said.

Baiterek practices the single

window approach, revising an investor's project "for cross-selling tools of 11 subsidiaries," he said.

"At the initial stage of the project, the project developer can contact our subsidiary, Kazakhstan Project Preparation Fund (KPPF), and receive assistance in the preparation of project documentation, project expertise and assistance looking for a partner," he noted.

"In terms of PPP (private public partnership) projects, KPPF provides full support to project developers in the person of state bodies and private companies from the zero stage of the project to the implementation itself," he added. "The company has good resources at the level of project appraisal and works closely with international financial organisations such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank and the International Finance Corporation."

Depending on the size of a project, the holding can obtain financing through its several sub-

idiaries. Larger projects are usually financed by the Development Bank of Kazakhstan, the holding's key development institution.

Risks associated with Kazakh market

Arifkhanov noted financial risks of starting investment projects in the Kazakh market.

"The most relevant for Kazakh enterprises is currency risk, when, without export earnings, the company receives a loan in foreign currencies," he said.

Baiterek, therefore, avoids projects in foreign currencies to mitigate the risk for an enterprise without export earnings.

"Also, during the lengthy preparation of the investment project for individual projects, there is a risk of an increase in value, as a result of which the risk of completion of the construction of the object at a later date is likely," he added.

In addition, there are technical risks that should be detected on

time such as non-compliance of selected equipment and non-testing of production technologies, he said. The holding can assess these risks and suggest ways to minimise them during the examination stage of an investment project.

Cooperating with more Dutch companies

Arifkhanov expressed the company's eagerness "to establish close cooperation with Dutch companies on projects" Oct. 31 during the fifth Kazakh-Dutch business forum in The Hague.

"In particular, Baiterek is interested in establishing cooperation with Dutch companies on projects both in Kazakhstan and abroad. The holding is ready to assist in the entry of Dutch companies into the Kazakhstan market by providing a toolbox of 11 subsidiaries (that includes) searching for a co-investor, development of project documentation, co-financing, trade financing and others," he said.

"The foreign participants of the Kazakh-Dutch business forum showed great interest in the holding tools," he added.

As part of the forum, Dutch company Farm Frites and the Kazakh K-Agro companies signed an agreement to establish an agricultural products processing facility in Kazakhstan. The project "is currently under consideration by the Development Bank of Kazakhstan," which is a subsidiary of the holding, said Arifkhanov.

The Netherlands is Kazakhstan's biggest investor and one of its leading European Union (EU) trading partners. According to the Kazakh National Bank, its gross inflow of direct investment from the Netherlands-based companies reached more than \$85 billion from 2005-2018; the figure for the first half of 2019 was \$3.4 billion.

Among the major Dutch investors are Agip Caspian Sea BV, Finfur Holdings BV, Floodgate Holding, Lukarco B.V., Royal Dutch Shell and Witteveen+Bos.

Almaty region leads Kazakhstan in investment projects

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The Almaty region is implementing the most investment projects in the country, with 34 projects worth \$3.8 billion planned for the next few years, the Kazakh Invest company reports. Ten projects are expected to launch at the end of this year.

Overall, 168 projects are registered in the Kazakh Invest monitoring system nationwide.

"We have a three-level system of working with foreign investors. Initially, when we have an

offer, we provide basic information about Kazakhstan and its investment opportunities, including taxes and other conditions. Then investors visit our region to discuss the project, select a site and consult on the provision of necessary documents and other services. We create all conditions for the implementation of the investment project. Our task is to make the investor feel comfortable in Kazakhstan from the start of the project and after its launch. We are also interested in further investments and modernisation," said Darya Ovsyanikova, director of the regional

representative office of Kazakh Invest.

She noted work is underway to attract new investors. Almaty's investment indicators are growing by 30 percent annually, and more than 20 multinational companies operate in the region.

Major projects with foreign participation include the Wilo Central Asia plant, the Lukoil Lubricants Central Asia lubricants production plant and a 100-megawatt solar plant.

The Wilo Central Asia plant, worth \$5 million, was launched in 2018. It is located on an area of more than 2,000 square metres and

includes a high-tech centre for the production and testing of pumping systems, a training centre for designers and engineers and a service centre for public utilities. The company supplies equipment for healthcare facilities, the Ministry of Defence, educational institutions, sports facilities and public utilities.

The lubricants plant, worth \$94 million, is designed to produce 100,000 metric tonnes of lubricants per year and created some 200 jobs. The plant exports its products to Central Asia.

Located in Kapshagai, the Enverse Kunkuat solar station, worth \$71 million, was launched in September. As one of the largest solar parks in the country, it will generate approximately 160 million kilowatt of electricity. It reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 150,000 tonnes per year.

Ovsyanikova said investors are interested in projects in Almaty's agricultural sector due to its fertile land and favourable climate. The region also has potential in logistics, sales and mar-

keting and tourism. "We observe the interest of investors from many countries because Kazakhstan is a good platform for doing business due to its trans-border location. For example, we work with investors from Germany, as their advanced technologies are interesting to us. Foreign businesspeople feel safe due to the fact that the rights of local and foreign investors are equal. Therefore, they have confidence their rights will also be respected here," she added.



Lukoil Lubricants Central Asia plant.

Akmola Region works to improve investment climate

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Akmola Region Akim (Governor) Yermek Marzhikpaev organised the first investor hour and personal entrepreneurs' reception Nov. 27 at the Atameken Regional Chamber of Entrepreneurs.

During the informal session, potential investors and entrepreneurs with investment initiatives presented nearly 20 tourism, agriculture and medicine projects and development plans and outlined problems they face in executing them in the region. The business casual format was new to the district akims and industry department representatives.

"We plan to hold such meetings regularly. Such a format for holding meetings in the form of live

communication and feedback will allow precise and quick work out of investors' problematic issues regarding the implementation of projects with the aim to improve the investment climate in the region," said Marzhikpaev, reported inform.kz.

"We believe such a format for a meeting between the regional akim and business is very much in demand for a positive solution to the issues raised," added Atameken Director Timur Nakhimbekov.

Borey Energo's construction project for a more than 100-megawatt wind power station in the Arshaly district received full support. The company also plans to attract Chinese investors.

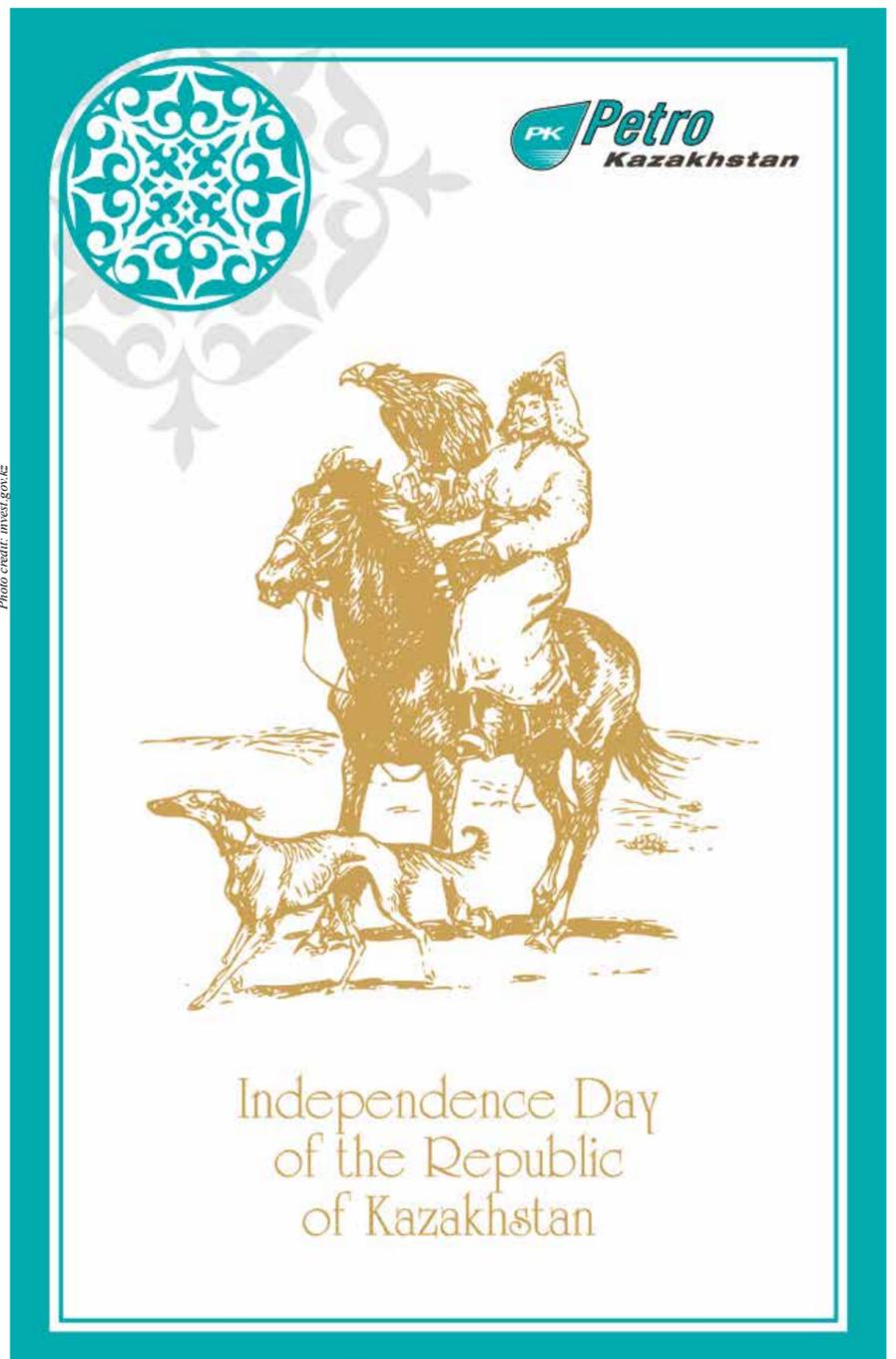
Turkish Green Valley shared its plans regarding a lentil growing and processing plant with a capacity of 200 tonnes per day. The com-

pany is considering opening it near Kokshetau.

Another Turkish company, Kusto Energy, has plans to build a biogas plant for the Makinsk poultry farm and KazBeef in Burabai district. The firm specialises in the energy sector and has the resources and technology to build and manage biogas plants producing environmentally friendly electricity, heat, gas and organic fertilisers.

The parties agreed to design a roadmap to resolve each enterprise's problems and assign a state body to work with them.

"The region akim supported the proposal to hold such meetings every month at the site of the Atameken Chamber of Entrepreneurs in the business format. The next topic of the meeting will identify issues related to the development of agriculture," said Nakhimbekov.



BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Thirty-one agreements worth \$2.3 billion inked at Almaty Investment Forum 2019

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

ALMATY – Thirty-one agreements worth \$2.3 billion were signed between governmental bodies and the business community Nov. 27 at Almaty Investment Forum 2019.

The major deals included an \$11.3-million agreement on green city financing between the Almaty akimat (city administration) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and a memorandum of cooperation with the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC).

The forum was held as the city is creating its development strategy for the next 30 years, said Akim (Mayor) Bakytzhan Sagintayev. The strategy through 2050, presented in open discussion with citizens, is designed for Almaty to enter the top 100 best cities in the world in terms of quality of life and business opportunities.

The city authorities have plans to modernise the urban infrastructure to improve the quality and comfort of life. The akimat adopted a special package of short and medium-term development plans primarily relating to a new Almaty including the metropolitan area and city outskirts. The design will solve the most urgent urban problems – water supply, lighting, landscaping and security and the infrastructure upgrades will open a new invest-



Akim (Mayor) Bakytzhan Sagintayev.

ment field in the next five years.

“We need a strong economy. The urban economy should develop at a rate of at least 5 percent per year. We began a structural reform of the urban economy to ensure this growth. We are focusing on the sectors of the new economy. This structural manoeuvre opens up fundamentally new fields for investment,” said Sagintayev.

The structural scheme will develop export production and expand the presence of Almaty manufacturers in the global high-tech economy. The growth will be polycentric and concentrated in several zones in different parts of the city.

Almaty boasts a favourable

business and investment climate. The city ranks first among all Kazakh regions in the World Bank’s subnational rating for ease of doing business. In September, Fitch Rating assigned Almaty a BBB with Stable Outlook, which means a low level of risk for investment.

The city can be seen as a global business centre and major transport, logistics and tourist hub on the New Silk Road.

“We will develop areas that require knowledge and high qualifications, which are in demand in the regional and international markets. First, these include finance and insurance, information and communication technologies, logistics and distribution. Almaty has strong traditions, a first-class personnel school, high reputation and growth prospects. We will increase the share of these sectors in the economy and employment in the future,” Sagintayev said.

Construction is also an attractive investment, as the volume of housing commissioning has grown annually to more than two million square metres. Authorities will stimulate investment in the residential sector by offering a preferential rate both on mortgages and to install engineering infrastructure.

Social economy is also an important driver of economic growth. At least 19 schools, 16 outbuildings, 400 kindergartens and 30 medical

institutions will be required in the next five years.

Almaty will develop according to the smart city concept and introduce the best smart practices in planning and development, housing and utilities, security, transport, education, healthcare and city management.

“Almaty has scientific and technical potential. Thirty-five percent of the country’s organisations in research and development are located here and 42 percent of all workers in research and development are employed here. I invite investors to participate in the accelerated formation of an effective innovation ecosystem of the city,” said Sagintayev.

Almaty is expected to develop as a cultural creative city, a centre of innovation and new knowledge economy industries. A creative economy is seen as the most promising investment industry.

TAV Airports Holding and TAV Construction Mustafa co-founder and Chief Executive Officer Sani Şener recently announced the company’s plan to invest \$165 million in Almaty International Airport in the coming years. The investment will significantly increase the capabilities of the updated airport, adding one million additional passengers and creating 3,000 jobs.

The airline industry is growing rapidly and passenger traffic is increasing. Seven billion passengers

currently use air services, a figure which will double by 2036.

“Airports are the places where foreign investors and foreign tourists get the first impression when they arrive and get the full impression when they leave. Airports are called showrooms of the cities... There are three players in the aviation industry. One is aircraft manufacturers like Airbus and Boeing; the other one is airlines like Turkish Airlines or Qatar Airways. The third one is airports and unfortunately, being mainly government-owned, the airports stay at the very back compared to other two players,” he added.

Mehmet Şimşek, Qatar Investor and Dome Group Financial Advisors consultant and former Turkish Vice Prime Minister, spoke at the forum about the challenges of the global economy.

“There’s a global manufacturing recession out there. World trade is usually the main engine of growth. If you go back to the pre-financial crisis, world trade was growing at twice global GDP growth. Today, the trade volume is barely growing. This year it is estimated at 1.2 percent, less than half of the global GDP growth rate of around 3 percent,” he said.

Domestic growth dynamics are now more important and Kazakhstan has good planning, governance and resources.

“Kazakhstan has resources to support its reform programme,

transformation programme. It has stability at a time when we have seen a lot of disruptions in many parts of the world. There’s a geopolitical recession. With such a vision, resources, strong team and talent, I think Almaty and Kazakhstan can [not only] attract talent, but also capital,” he added.

Human capital stock is the most important thing for cities or countries and the quality of that stock is the most defining factor in terms of success or failure. Providing people with “skills, upskilling them, reskilling them, the existing stock of capital, then success is almost guaranteed,” said Şimşek.

The United Kingdom is Kazakhstan’s biggest investor, said House of Lords member and former U.K. Trade and Industry and Social Security Secretary Lord Peter Lilley. He encouraged developing knowledge and researching businesses, adding regulation is also important.

“Almaty has a highly educated population and [more] centres of higher education than many other countries. It is a tremendous opportunity for you to encourage the development of businesses related to your universities and hospitals, too,” he added.

The forum, attended by more than 700 businesspeople, also addressed investment cooperation opportunities, developing the smart city concept, trends in the real estate market and the challenges facing modern cities.

Center for Research and Consulting seeks to make Kazakhstan attractive to talented individuals

By Galiya Khasenkanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Center for Research and Consulting (CRC) is a relatively young and growing company with the vision of a better Kazakhstan. Its specialisation lies in strategic consulting for public sector. It strives to make the country more competitive and attractive for talented people.

“The key here is for Kazakhstan to determine what proposition is needed to make it attractive to the talented youth of the world. We believe Kazakhstan can become successful and for that it needs to become people centric,” said one of the company’s three partners Anuar Buranbayev.

CRC wants to change Kazakhstan’s priorities by advocating for the need to create attractive surroundings for talents from all the regions.

“As a company, we hire young inexperienced people and start teaching them. We think our biggest achievement is that we prevented ten talented people from leaving Kazakhstan. These people initially believed that they needed to leave, that it is impossible to find a job without connections or be paid well for hard work. We [convinced] them with our belief in the nation,” he added.

Buranbayev noted many Kazakhs are pessimistic, forcing them to look towards the West, yet many Kyrgyz, Turks and Uzbeks come to Kazakhstan and become successful without any connections or help. The nation offers opportunities for development and notes it is important to accept those who come to the country.

Almaty, for example, has food chains run by Kyrgyz. While they were successful at home, the market was not big enough, so they moved to the Kazakh city and soon could move to Moscow. They create jobs, pay taxes and develop healthy competition for all businesses. They are talented and talented people choose big cities with more chances and opportunities, he explained.

Buranbayev is a supporter of



Anuar Buranbayev

urbanisation and concentrating the population. There are two approaches to population management – equalising the regions and bringing them to the same level or concentrating people in certain areas so each citizen will have more opportunities. Counter to the popular opinion of supporting villages, CRC has begun persuading the government to condense the population into bigger cities, as people are more important than regions.

These ideas resonated in Kazakhstan’s First President Nursultan Nazarbayev’s 2018 state-of-the-nation address – “from (bringing) infrastructure to people to (bringing) people to infrastructure.” Instead of spending money on extending the Internet to a remote, half-deserted village, it is better to bring people from disadvantaged locations to bigger towns and cities.

CRC has also conducted research that affected Kazakhstan politics. In spatial politics, specialists used to analyse Kazakhstan as an island of 17 regional entities working with each other. In 2017, the company completed a study for the Ministry of National Economy which attempted to look at Kazakhstan as an open system in the world. The research determined Kazakhstan as part of a big spatial system, a macro region where its northern cities depend more on Russian urban areas than Kazakh ones. Petropavlovsk is connected more to Omsk than the capital; Almaty is highly connected to China. Kazakhstan is

one nation, but from the point of view of economics and migration flows, it is diversified.

The company’s major projects in the last two years include the Conceptual vision of Industrial and Innovative Development for 2020-2025, the 2018 National Report on Entrepreneurship Development and the Nur-Sultan Strategy through 2050. CRC also held the Global Innovation Summit 2019 in the capital as one of the first Kazakh members of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils.

The company started in 2013 as a joint enterprise between an international consulting company and a local holding company. Buranbayev and Kainar Kozhumov bought CRC in 2015 with the dream of creating a strong strategic consulting competence centre in the country.

The company’s advantage is in its approach to consulting techniques. Instead of specialising in one area and applying it to all possible fields, the “golden hammer” approach, they use different instruments that apply to a particular case.

“We care for our clients; we do not try to make money off them. We want to change the country and the advice we give is aimed at that. Big international companies put profit over ideas, we, on the other hand, prefer to defend our opinions if it is worth it, and choose not to always agree. It is like with a doctor, sometimes the information is unpleasant but necessary,” said Buranbayev.

“Our recommendations are rooted in an objective analysis. There are times when a client may ask to alter the recommendations, but we would rather deny their request, if otherwise the desired result cannot be achieved. Honestly, sometimes we lose contracts because of that, thus we put ourselves under the risk too. However, this is our own choice, we put our values over profit. Integrity and honesty with which we approach our work help us to build strong ties with our clients,” said third partner, Kuanysh Zhaiikov.

Shymkent and Turkestan Region launch new factories



Photo credit: Primeminister.kz

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Prime Minister Askar Mamin launched textile and food plants Dec. 5 in Shymkent and the Turkestan Region, reported Kazakh Invest press service.

His visit to the country’s third largest city and adjacent region offered the opportunity to review the progress of the State Programme of Accelerated Industrial and Innovative Development and the Economy of Simple Things project initiated by First President Nursultan Nazarbayev and implemented by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev for the area’s social and economic growth.

In Shymkent, Mamin participated in the opening of the Alliance spinning mill. The company, a collaborative project between Kazakhstan Investment Fund and Uzbekistan’s Alliance Textile, was launched under agreements between the two governments on joint textile cluster development signed during last summer’s 18th session of the joint intergovernmental commission. A building which was boarded up for a long time was renovated and all facilities installed. Both sides worked diligently to complete the construction on time and finish the repairs.

“Kazakhstan’s First President Nursultan Nazarbayev has set a goal on the Economy of Simple Things development and light industry plays a special role in it. Now, we can see the first results,” said Mamin at the ceremony.

Mamin also launched a fast food products plant in Maylyoshak village of the Turkestan Region. CG Foods Central Asia, the largest instant noodle company, invested 5.7 billion tenge (US\$14 million) in the project and plans to hire more than 300 individuals.

He noted the factory launch will provide the impetus for further growth of the Kazakh textile cluster, adding Tokayev has repeatedly spoken about the importance of foreign investments in the nation’s non-commodity sector.

The 120-employee enterprise

plans to raise its annual capacity up to 6,000 tonnes. Investments by Uzbek partners will reach approximately 4.6 billion tenge (US\$120 million).

Two more factories will be launched under the road map as part of the Shymkent textile cluster rehabilitation. The operation, according to experts, would double the volume growth of cotton recycled in Kazakhstan and generate 800 additional jobs.

Mamin also launched a fast food products plant in Maylyoshak village of the Turkestan Region. CG Foods Central Asia, the largest instant noodle company, invested 5.7 billion tenge (US\$14 million) in the project and plans to hire more than 300 individuals.

The facility’s estimated annual capacity will be approximately 4,500 tonnes of products supplied both to the internal and international markets. The owners indicated they will only use domestic raw materials.

Mamin also visited soon-to-be-opened facilities in Turkestan city, including the Turkestan International Airport construction site and public road leading to the future air harbour. The airport will be built with Turkish investor participation, said the then Kazakh Invest Board Chairperson Saparbek Tuyakbayev in May.

Nation&Capital

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Barys HC celebrates 20th anniversary with 5-1 win over Dynamo Minsk



President of Kazakhstan's Ice Hockey Federation and the country's Prime Minister Askar Mamin (C), Nur-Sultan Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov (fourth from the left), Barys Hockey Club President Boris Ivanishchev (next to Mamin) as well as former Barys players with their families.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The capital's Barys Hockey Club celebrated its 20-year anniversary and honoured its greatest players in a pregame ceremony Dec. 1 at Barys Arena.

The jerseys worn by Nikolai Antropov, Brandon Bochenski, Kevin Dallman, Alexander Koreshkov, Fyodor Polischuk, Vitali Yermeyev and Talgat Zhailauov were raised to the rafters for the first time ahead of the game. The team members wore special jerseys with the names of all the former players in its 5-1 win against Dynamo Minsk.

Barys Club is a well-developed system of training athletes from children's hockey to professional players, noted Kazakhstan Ice Hockey Federation President Askar Mamin.

"Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev has made a huge contribution to the devel-

opment of sports, including ice hockey. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pays great attention to the development of professional and mass sports. I want to thank the players and coaches for making the club's history," he said.

The sold-out arena hosted approximately 11,000 fans who gave a warm welcome to favourite players Bochenski and Dallman, who retired last season. In an interview with sports.kz, Bochenski noted the capital is a special city for him, adding he hopes to return next year and spend more time in the city.

Canadian fan Cory Truscott was among those who congratulated Barys via Instagram. A native of Victoria, he has supported Kazakh hockey players since the country played in the Ice Hockey World Championships in 1993.

"Kazakhstan has a great hockey system and has come a long way in the years. I've been a fan of Barys since Darren Dietz joined the team. I've been a fan of Dar-

ren since then. I watched him play in Canada in a league called the Western Hockey League. I know that Barys has a great organisation and that the team is part of the Kontinental Hockey League and has been around for 20 seasons now and is operated by great people. The arena is definitely the nicest one I've seen and watched hockey in and the atmosphere is amazing with the fan base and support," he told The Astana Times.

Truscott attended games during the 2019 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Division I Championship this spring in the capital, when the Kazakh national team qualified for the top league next year. He also supported the Kazakh junior hockey team at the World Juniors in January in Vancouver, Canada.

"I've cheered for Kazakhstan every year they're in the world juniors and it was an honour to watch them in Victoria. I've never seen a team play with so much heart for its country. Kazakhstan

has a great future in hockey – I totally see it and the fans that I saw and met were great," he added.

Barys took a two-goal lead within 30 seconds of the start of the second period when Corban Knight and Roman Starchenko scored. Dynamo Minsk's Alexander Kogalyov made it 2-1, but Atte Ohtamaa extended his team's lead. Knight scored his second goal a few minutes before the end of the third period, then Pavel Akolzin hit the empty net for the final goal.

The win helped Barys break a series of 16 matches without wins in regular time.

Barys head coach Andrei Skabelka noted the legendary players helped the current team win the game.

"First of all, it's nice to see legends in our locker room. Your winning spirit inspired the team and helped them to win. Finally, we scored more than two goals and [did not need to go into] overtime. I congratulate all of you," he said.

Friends of Denis Ten ice show comes to Nur-Sultan Dec. 14

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Friends of Denis Ten ice show will take place Dec. 14 in the capital, reported the show's Instagram account @denistenshow. This event is slated to feature skaters such as Tatyana Volosozhar, Maxim Trankov, Ekaterina Gordeeva, Kaitlyn Weaver, Andrew Poje and Jeremy Abbot.

The show started as Denis Ten and Friends, when the Kazakh Olympian and his skating colleagues organised the country's first ice shows. After Ten's death in 2018, his team continued inviting athletes to shows in the capital and Almaty.

Pairs skaters Volosozhar and Trankov are two-time Olympic champions, World Champions, four-time European and three-time Russian champions. This will be their second appearance with the show.

Gordeeva, who will be making her debut, is a Russian figure skater who, with her late partner and husband Sergei Grinkov, was a two-time Olympian and four-time World Champion.

Ice dancers Weaver and Poje, performing for the third time, are

three-time World Championship medallists, three-time Canadian National champions and two-time Grand Prix Final and Four Continents champions.

Abbott is the 2008 Grand Prix Final champion, two-time Four Continents bronze medallist and four-time U.S. national champion.

Kazakh British Technological University launched a scholarship for KBTU student athletes Nov. 20 in Ten's honour. The scholarship seeks to encourage students to continue his legacy by combining studies with competitive sports.

"Denis was a graduate student of the Executive MBA of KBTU Business School and actively participated in the life of our university. Despite great success in sports, he did not stop there and continued to develop in various directions, inspiring our youth with his own example. That is why we decided to give the name of Denis to the KBTU cinema hall, as well as to establish a scholarship named after Denis Ten with the support of the Endowment Foundation, in order to honour the memory of our champion and continue his work," KBTU President Kenzhebek Ibrashev told kt.kz.

Thousands of people visit annual Christmas Charity Bazaar for cultural exchange, goodwill

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – "I am near Switzerland! Let's meet in Iraq in ten minutes," is a sentence that would make sense only if one could time travel or visit the 12th annual Diplomatic Christmas Charity Bazaar Dec. 1 at Radisson Hotel Astana in Nur-Sultan.

The bazaar brought a little something from 53 countries represented by embassies in Kazakhstan. The visitors, for example, could buy Indian chicken curry, Mongolian wool socks, Spanish wine and Georgian churchkhela – all in one place.

"You can feel the culture of every country. It is so interesting to plunge into it and feel it. To see their cuisine, their national clothes, traditions that they convey through this bazaar," a visitor Saltanat Tur-labekova told The Astana Times.

The bazaar became a good tradition for many. Assel Zhanbulatova, who helped run the raffle from the

British Embassy, has been visiting the event for the last eight years.

"That is a mini gastronomy tour around the world in an hour or two. I think this kind of event is very rare. And I like that people gather here and talk to each other. Although it is in their small circles, anyways it is an interesting social event. And of course it is for a good cause – all money goes to the charity," said Zhanbulatova.

There were also stalls from schools, organisations such as the United Nations, companies such as Kunde social café, Dom Mamy (Mother's house) fund that provides support for young mothers, among other small local companies.

In addition to a cultural exchange, the bazaar offered the spirit of Christmas and New Year. The decorated trees, Santa Claus, or rather Joulupukki performed by the Finnish Ambassador Mikko Kivikoski, gingerbread houses and Christmas tunes created the atmosphere.

Continued on Page B8

Narxoz University launches dual degree programmes with universities from France, Russia and UK

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Narxoz University is launching dual degree programmes beginning next year with leading partner institutions including Birkbeck (University of London), the University of Coventry and Keele University (U.K.); La Rochelle University (France) and the Financial Academy under Russian government.

Students will study three years at Narxoz and one year at the partner university. Upon graduation, they will receive degrees from both institutions.

Narxoz University Rector and U.S. Academy of Sciences member Andrew Wachtel explained in an interview for this story that one of the main advantages of the dual programme is that the agreements allow students to work in the U.K. for two years after graduation. Tuition fees are expected to be affordable.

"The price for these will be lower than in universities in Malaysia, the Czech Republic, Poland and the UAE (United Arab Emirates) and approximately one third of the price of programmes in the U.K., the U.S. and Canada," he said.

The university also offers aca-



Andrew Wachtel

demographic mobility options, but Wachtel feels in the next few years most students will want double degree programmes, making one-semester academic mobility less popular.

Narxoz promotes not only its education but also its lifestyle and location and sees itself as a hub for talent development.

"In the 21st century, a university can no longer be simply a place where people come to get information. Instead, by bringing

people together and forcing them to confront difficult issues and ideas, we create a generation of young people who think for themselves, ask questions, create new knowledge, feel at home in their own country and anywhere on the globe and have the mental flexibility to deal with a rapidly changing world. Because we are in Almaty, an ideal university city, we think that if we offer challenging and high-quality education as well as exciting opportunities for personal development, we can attract students from many surrounding countries, enriching both our Kazakh students and our visitors," he added.

A graduate of Harvard University, Wachtel received his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. He worked at the University of California, Stanford University and Northwestern University in Chicago. Before joining Narxoz, he served as President of the American University in Central Asia (AUCA) and currently heads the Association of American International Colleges and Universities.

Since his appointment in 2018, Wachtel has recreated the curriculum for first-year bachelor's students. He sees it as a crucial time

to teach students how to think, read and write, analyse, work with information, develop their own point of view, ask questions and work with others and learn from them. The study is focused on the 21st-century skills of English, computer programming, ethics, entrepreneurship and statistics.

The transition required retraining the faculty. Some teachers were either not willing or not able to adapt to new ways of doing things, he noted. As a result, the university has hired many new faculty members and is working hard to integrate them into its curriculum and approach.

"We are hiring well-trained practitioners who can strengthen what we offer our students in our major programmes, most of which are quite practically oriented. Fortunately, there are plenty of people in Almaty who have excellent educations and backgrounds and love the opportunity to work with demanding students. They don't want to work for us full-time, but that is fine as long as we make sure to instil in these part-time faculty members a strong sense of what we want our graduates to be like and to be able to do," he said.

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THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

BARYS ARENA

Dec. 14 at 6.30 p.m. Friends of Denis Ten, ice show HC Barys – HC SKA Saint Petersburg

Dec. 25 at 7.30 p.m.

NOMAD CITY HALL

Dec. 14, 15 at 1 p.m., 6 p.m. Imperial Russian Ballet presents The Nutcracker

ASTANA OPERA

Dec. 17 at 5 p.m. La Bayadère, ballet

Dec. 20, 22 at 7 p.m., Dec. 21 at 5 p.m. 5 p.m. Carmen, opera

Dec. 24 at 7 p.m., Dec. 25 at 7 p.m. Violin Melodies about Love, concert

The Silknet Ladder, opera Christmas Concert

ASTANA BALLET

Dec. 20-22 at 7.30 p.m., 6 p.m. Cinderella

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Social workers start adaptation for children returned from Iraq

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan's humanitarian operation on Nov. 27 brought 14 children back to their homeland from an Iraqi prison, where they have been living for two years with their mothers. The life "after" will start for them with courses of rehabilitation at Pravo public fund's regional centres.

"There are six of them (mothers). They are in an Iraqi prison in Baghdad. They have been serving the life sentence, which in Iraq means 25 years. And for two years they (children) have been there with their mothers. Unfortunately, our government only got to know that our citizens are in an Iraqi prison in March," said The Astana Times reporter Assel Satubaldina who was reporting from Baghdad.

Previously, over the period from January to June, a different action, called Operation Jusan, returned 595 Kazakh citizens, including 406 children, among them 33 orphans, from Syria.

In Baghdad, Kazakh diplomats found an orphaned child kept in an orphanage and 13 "others were with their mothers in prison."

"The condition is harsh in prison. All have some kind of illness. All have scabies," Kazakh Foreign Ministry's official who preferred not to mention his name told The Astana Times.

The Kazakh government has been supporting the rehabilita-



tion of the returnees. These are the children of Kazakh citizens who began to leave Kazakhstan with their families eight years ago following promises of a better life by DAESH. The tale ended when they arrived in a zone of military conflict.

Following Operation Jusan that returned adults as well, the government charged with penalties men who had an irrefutable evidence of being engaged in terroristic acts.

The public, however, should leave their bias behind when it comes to the children, because

"they're not guilty of what happened to them," said Olga Ryl, the head of Pravo Public Fund that works with the adaptation of the children to a normal life where children play toys, not guns, reported sputniknews.kz.

"We are working to ensure that

there is no stigma towards these children, and to all children. If a child has committed an offence or a crime, even the most serious one, this does not mean that you need to put an end to it. You need to work with him," she said.

So, what is the "after" for the children?

"We will now go to the child rehabilitation centre, where children will be for some time while they will have full medical check-up, and then a range of inspections, and then will join their relatives, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles," Aruzhan Sain, Kazakhstan's Ombudsman for Children's Rights told The Astana Times after they landed at Nazarbayev International Airport Nov. 27.

Then the children are in the trusteeship of Pravo Public Fund's centres. These are the only centres that deal with the "adaptation of minors and their socialisation related to de-radicalisation matters that we have created and have been creating since 2010," said Ryl in an interview for this story.

After they arrive in Kazakhstan "some live in our (Pravo) centres along with mothers; some come to our day hospital to receive a range of social services," she said.

All children, at first, have no identity documents. The government could immediately restore the duplicate documents for 113 children who were born in Kazakhstan and returned from Syria.

For children who have rights for citizenship by blood and not by soil, there is "a long process underway to restore documents, because under the law we must make sure that this child is of these parents," Mazhilis (lower house of the Parliament) member Zagipa Baliyeva said during the Oct. 19 Child-Friendly Kazakhstan Conference in Nur-Sultan, reported kursiv.kz.

The age range of the children returned from the Iraqi prison vary from one year to 13 years. Many of them would have to go through a similar complex documentation procedure that on average takes nearly four months.

The documents for children who have been returned in the first half of the year "now are in the final process. We performed genomic examinations. Court hearings passed. And now the court decision comes into force. On the basis of this, we receive birth certificates of the children," Ryl said.

The children saved from Iraq are from all of the parts of Kazakhstan just like the children who arrived with the previous missions from Syria. They will be later relocated in accordance with their parents' last registered residence.

"They are all from various regions. We hope they will adapt quickly. They are mostly little. So we want them to have a new life and (we want) them to forget what has happened before. In their motherland, everything will be all different," said Sain.

ECO Networks offers businesses a way to make recycling profitable

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Discussions of environmental responsibility have now permeated Kazakh society and the one-year-old ECO Networks project aims to change how people dispose of waste, starting with the workplace.

ECO Networks helps businesses create their own Eco Offices, where employees can sort waste for recycling, find companies to distribute their sorted waste – and thereby promote themselves as an environmentally friendly workplace.

"I thought about it when I first started sorting the waste at home. Well, I realised that everything with the infrastructure is very bad. Even if there are containers [for processing recyclables], they throw all in one, dump it into a single truck," ECO Networks Founder and Kazakhstan Stock Exchange (KASE) Managing Director Yevgenii Mukhamedzhanov told The Astana Times.

According to him, although Kazakhstan has recycling plants, there are no services serving people who want to recycle.

"I studied the market a bit. I looked at how some projects were working on the market. And I realised that basically they are students. Of course, they can-



ECO Networks Founder and KASE Managing Director Yevgenii Mukhamedzhanov.

there are printing houses... In order to solve this issue on a large scale, we needed a service that would learn how to work with business and make it profitable for business to pay for it," he said.

The Kazakh market buys a kilogramme of paper waste for 20 tenge (US\$0.05). But paying to have such a small amount of paper sent to a recycling service would likely cost more than that. That means recycling is a drain on businesses, not a benefit.

ECO Networks, therefore, focuses on corporate standards and company image, aiming to use recycling to boost a business' brand, Mukhamedzhanov said.

"We made the focus to the HR brand. We invested into the values of the workers, so that the external image is formed. And we came with this product and told a business 'Would you like this? It will cost from 20,000 (US\$51.70) and higher depending on the number of the staff. We are ready to implement and accompany.' The business took it very well," he said.

ECO Networks tested their concept with four companies Nov. 15, 2018, and added one later.

"They liked it and in March we announced that we are ready to go for the industrial exploitation. And we started to actively attract companies, and we're growing fast," he said.

The company has been growing almost exponentially in its year of its existence. To date, ECO Networks has 75 companies in its network that covers approximately 15,000 people. "Approximately 80 percent of

the companies with which we meet sign a contract with us," Mukhamedzhanov said. "We see that the companies participate with great pleasure and are responsive. In other words, we chose the precise moment... When people understand that nothing good happens for free."

The company attracts all kinds of businesses, from small firms with a handful of employees to companies like Kcell and Astana Motors with thousands.

The project has launched services in Nur-Sultan, Aktobe and Taldykorgan.

"We recently signed our first franchise deal in Kazakhstan. Currently, we are doing the first round of investment," he said.

"We have a goal to reach one million people in five years. In other words, we will have one million conscious people who will pressure all those who are unaware."

ECO Networks also started a social project to provide their service in seven public schools free of charge.

"We are not ready to take money from them. We take them as a social responsibility. In other words, we are a social entrepreneur and as a social project we work with schools," he said.

"Plus, we have social projects in the social area. We order all our eco boxes from the Society of People with Blindness. And the Society of Mothers with Many Children design all the string bags and bags for clients... We are always coming up with ways to develop this social ideology," he added.

ECO Networks has plans to grow bigger and eventually make more people socially responsible.

"We have a goal to reach 1 million people in five years. In other words, we will have 1 million conscious people who will pressure all those who are unaware," he said.

National Olympic Committee names country's best athletes



Skater Elizabet Tursynbayeva.



Boxer Bekzad Nurdauletov.

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh National Olympic Committee recognised the country's best athletes for 2019 Nov. 30 during the Altyн Samgau awards ceremony in the capital. In traditional fashion, eminent and titled sports veterans including Victor Aboimov, Guzel Manyurova, Kuralbek Ordabayev, Olga Shishigina and Zhaksylyk Ushkempirov presented the awards.

Boxer Bekzad Nurdauletov won the title of Best Summer Sports Athlete. Nurdauletov, who won the gold medal at the World Cup in Yekaterinburg, Russia, defeated Olympic champion and four-time world champion Julio Cesar La Cruz, of Cuba, in the semi-finals.

Nineteen-year-old skater Elizabet Tursynbayeva won Best Winter Sports Athlete for her silver medal at the World Figure Skating Championships in Saitama, Japan. She performed the quadruple salchow in the free skate programme, becoming the first female skater to successfully complete the difficult element in senior competition.

Abilmansur Batyrgali, winner of the World Karate Youth Championships in Chile, was named Best Young Athlete. The committee recognised the Kazakh National

Ice Hockey Federation as the Best National Sports Federation.

The Kyzylorda Region Department of Physical Culture and Sports was named the Best Sports Region. Freestyle wrestling champion Alisher Yergali received the Breakthrough of the Year award. He won a Kazakh team license for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo at the World Cup in the capital.

Freestyle wrestling team coach Aset Serikbaev and freestyle mogul team head coach Yelena Kruglykhina were honoured as the Best Coaches in summer and winter sports, respectively. Kruglykhina won the title for the second consecutive time. Her trainee, Yulia Galysheva, was the first Kazakh

athlete to earn gold in the Mogul Freestyle World Championship.

The men's national ice hockey team won Best Team of the Year. The team made it to the elite division of the world hockey championship by winning at the world championship (group A, first division) in the capital.

The Altyн Samgau committee included nominations in Paralympic sports for the first time in its history. Nurlan Dombay was named Best Paralympic Athlete for his gold medal in the under 75 kilogramme weight category at the 2019 Para Taekwondo World Championship. The victory made him a two-time world champion.

The Best Paralympic Sports Trainer was the judo team's head coach Zhandos Kiyanov.



Kazakhstan's Olympic cycling gold medalist Alexander Vinokurov is greeted by the fans as he arrives as a guest of honour.

In order to solve this issue on a large scale, we needed a service that would learn how to work with business and make it profitable for business to pay for it."

not do anything of large-scale to solve the problem. That is, they bring the boxes, take them away and quickly close," he said.

ECO Networks also wants both itself and the businesses it serves to profit from their partnership.

"On waste paper, you will not earn with small volumes. Large volumes have long been disassembled by large players where

CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Astana Ballet finishes first California tour

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Astana Ballet performed for the first time on the United States West Coast Nov. 19-22, reported its press service. Three California cities – Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco – were struck by the Kazakh national art and work of modern choreographers.

“The national dance had a colossal impact on me. It is absolutely different in body plastics and mood, which you do not often see, especially here in California. The richness of the costumes, these bright colours and, of course, the music struck me. There was something inspiring about it. This evening was a pleasant discovery for me and I hope to someday see the performance of this beautiful troupe again,” said San Francisco resident Susan Galant.

For four days, Astana Ballet artists showed their skills on the stages of Herbst Theatre in San Francisco, California Centre for the Arts and Spreckels Theatre in San Diego and the famous Saban Theatre in Los Angeles, which for decades was 20th Century Fox’s leading theatre.

Californians became acquainted with Astana Ballet with its trademark programme – the “Heritage of the Great Steppe” by Aigul Tati, which includes examples of Kazakh folk dance. During the intermission, audience members discussed the national music, artistic images and choreography.

The artists also presented



A scene from “A Fuego Lento” one-act ballet.

“Love’s Lost Idols,” the one-act lyrical ballet by American choreographer Nicolo Fonte. The performance answers the eternal question “How can we live and love if everything that we know and love will inescapably end?”

“For this ballet, I chose the music of the Italian composer Ezio Bosso (String Quartet No. 5 ‘Music for the Lodger’). This music is reminiscent of twilight, something similar to the

light that seeks to seep through a crack in the wall in order to finally be free – it is like a strong, instant, emotional manifestation of joy or wonder,” said Fonte.

“Love Fear Loss” and “A Fuego Lento,” works of invited choreographer Ricardo Amarante, have delighted audiences throughout the world and the United States with no exception.

“Love Fear Loss” consists of

three duets inspired by the life of renowned French singer Edith Piaf. Each piece expresses feelings of new love, then fear of indifference and, finally, tragedy of loss. “A Fuego Lento” speaks about feelings a person discovers when he or she encounters first love and desire.

Tickets to all performances were sold out and the audience acknowledged the artists with loud applause and flowers.

“Bravo, it was a great performance at a very high level. It is nice that they brought a varied programme that showed modern and national ballet. It allowed the artists to present themselves in different roles. I think the troupe has a great future – we will be glad to see them again in the United States!” said Los Angeles resident Brian Mitchell.

While the artists noted the

complex programme, active tour schedule, daily performances and flights between cities was a challenge, the tour tempered and inspired the characters.

Upon returning to Kazakhstan, Astana Ballet artists will start preparations for the big winter premiere of “Cinderella” from Dec. 20-22 and the New Year’s performance of “The Nutcracker” from Dec. 26-31.

Photo credit: Astana Ballet Press Service

Nur-Sultan hosts Not Just a Movie International Short Films Festival



Photo credit: vosmerka.kz

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Not Just a Movie International Short Films Festival, a collaborative project of Vosmerka.kz and the Office of Rossotrudnichestvo in Kazakhstan, opened Nov. 29 in the capital. For three days, participants and visitors were treated to 24 shorts from three constituent regions of Russia – Chuvashia, Tatarstan and Yakutiya, – as well as Kazakhstan.

“It is impossible not to highlight any of the announced works. All the films deserve to be watched, particularly as it takes not much time to do. We want our people to touch a wide variety of movie genres,” said festival Programme Director Alexandra Porsheva.

Kazakhstan presented nine movies covering various issues, from “With a Diploma to the Village” directed by Sangar Rakym to “The Sentry” by Alibek Aby.

The films were divided into two categories according to the acceptable age of the viewers: age 12+ (two movies only) and 18+. The themes were as different as their duration, as an average short film

lasts at least three minutes and no more than 40.

“The films you will see are not just cinematography – it is an act of creativity, an aspiration to express yourself, to get in contact. But most important about the

“The films you will see are not just cinematography – it is an act of creativity, an aspiration to express yourself, to get in contact. But most important about the films is the unique way of thinking and self-perception, helping to feel the world and society differently.”

films is the unique way of thinking and self-perception, helping to feel the world and society differently, to find out the similarities and disparities between the filmmakers and the audience. Do you know that the shorts competitions are the toughest races among movie directors? The short format is very popular now; all global film festivals include features in their competitive programmes,” noted Vosmerka.kz Chief Editor Yevgeny Lumpov.

He added the festival was not a competition, but an attempt at art communication between Kazakhs and Russians combined with the opportunity to see vivid novelties and festival short films.

Kazan International Short Film

Festival Programme Director Adilya Khaibullina, the festival’s special visitor, was one of the leading speakers at the “Short Film: How and Where to Watch It” open discussion following the event.

Not Just a Movie Festival opened a cycle of events under the VselennaYA (The Universe) Festival programme, organised by the Rossotrudnichestvo with the support of Roskosmos State Space Corporation that will go through Dec. 22.

‘Ayka’ honoured at China’s Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers film festival

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakhstan-made and Oscar-shortlisted film “Ayka” continues to win the hearts of international audiences, this time in China, where the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers festival recognised “Ayka” lead actress Samal Yeslyamova with the Best Leading Actress in a Foreign Film Audience Award and “Ayka” director Sergey Dvortsevoy with the Best Foreign Director Audience Award at the Nov. 21 awards ceremony.

“The film is very well received in China! They highly value the artistic quality of the movie, because they say that ‘that is exactly what we lack.’ Because the commercial ones take over and they are afraid to lose the artistic value of a movie... and of course it [“Ayka”] is very emotional,” Dvortsevoy told The Astana Times.

The film festival itself has been growing in prestige, delighting the Kazakh film’s Chinese co-producers.

“It is very important for them [Chinese co-producers]. This festival is becoming very big in China and it is important for future movie rental... And for Kazakhstan it is important as well. It is important that we are known in this huge country for our Kazakh culture. This is wonderful!” the director said.

According to Dvortsevoy, there were originally 28 foreign movies competing in the nominations. But “then it was cut to 12 and, eventually, for some reason, they had two winners for each nomination.”

“What made me happy is that this prize is not only from the audience – it is made jointly with the juries, so there are some professionals and the audience. [Being the audience’s choice] is especially pleasing, of course. That means in China they liked the movie,” he said.

Chinese audiences watched two movies produced by Kazakh filmmakers. The second, Zhanabek Zhetirouov’s “Shanyrau,” was almost equally well received.

“Shanyrau” was undeservedly deprived of attention in Kazakhstan. But it had good engagement in China. Distributors got interest-

ed. There was a big interest from the live audience,” “Shanyrau” producer Zarina Kissikova told The Astana Times.

“Ayka” is about a young Kyrgyz immigrant who lives and works illegally in Moscow. After an unwanted pregnancy, she abandons her baby in a hospital.

“The movie is terrific! It is travelling the world for the second year. It has a very big audience. They had been shooting it for very long. Each scene is well thought through.”

“The movie is terrific! It is travelling the world for the second year. It has a very big audience. They had been shooting it for very long. Each scene is well thought through... you see that a person dedicated a lot of years for this. The tremendous play of Samal Yeslyamova deserved its prize from the Cannes festival. Indeed, well deserved. Of course, it is not for everyone, but it found its audi-

ence. The film was very warmly received in China. The question and answer session about both of our movies were full. It was very flattering. People were well prepared and actively asked questions,” said Kissikova.

Yeslyamova won Best Actress for her role in “Ayka” at the Cannes Film Festival, the Asian Oscars and the 28th International Film Festival in Germany. She received the Grand Prix at the Cottbus Film Festival, surpassing 190 other performers. The actress also became the laureate of the Kazakhstan People’s Favourite 2018 awards in the Breakthrough of the Year nomination.

The film was shortlisted for the American Academy Award from Kazakhstan.

The China Film Association started the Golden Rooster Awards for the best Chinese filmmakers in 1981. In 1992, the Golden Rooster and the One Hundred Flowers awards were combined into a single national festival. The awards opened for filmmakers of other countries in 2005. The film festival has nominations in 20 categories.

Fifty Chinese films competed in the nominations this year. The main prizes of the festival, Best Directing and Best Film, went to the film “Farewell, My Son.”



Sergey Dvortsevoy receives the award.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering delivers new batch of armoured vehicles to defence ministry

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering (KPE) delivered a series of Arlan 4x4 mine-protected armoured wheeled vehicles (AWVs) Nov. 28 to the Ministry of Defence and Special Services Division.

KPE is a joint venture of the Paramount Group, a global aerospace and technology company based in South Africa. In addition to the Arlan 4x4, the company produces advanced AWVs such as the Nomad 4x4, Barys 6x6 and Barys 8x8.

“The delivery of yet another significant batch of armoured vehicles to the customer is testament to the commitment, hard work and skills set of the KPE team,” said Paramount Group Chair Ivor Ichikowitz.

Arlan AWVs are essentially Paramount’s iconic Marauder vehicles, but enhanced and adapted to Kazakhstan’s severe winter conditions. They operate in temperatures as low as –50 degrees Celsius and summer temperatures up to +50 degrees, with a temperature



Arlan armoured wheeled vehicles.

control system ensuring safety and comfort for military personnel. The range allows the armed forces to complete extensive mission

requirements such as long-range border patrol or quick reaction force operations in extreme environments.

“The strong growth of Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering, driven through indigenous manufacturing solutions, has been an

important success story. The portable manufacturing model that we have pioneered around the world has enhanced indigenous capability, high-skills training and local expertise,” he added.

The Arlan has a modular design and double-skin monocoque. With its V-shaped hull, the vehicle can withstand the debris, dissipate energy of explosions and offer increased protection against mine blasts.

The AWV provides STANAG 4569 Level 3 ballistic protection against small arms ammunition and Levels 3a and 3b blast protection against mine explosions. It will survive 10-kilogramme TNT (trinitrotoluene chemical explosive) mine blasts beneath its hull, 10-kilogramme TNT beneath any wheel and a 50-kilogramme TNT side blast explosion.

The vehicle is also equipped with radiation, chemical and biological protection (RCB) allowing it to survive radiation dust spread, gas and/or biological attacks. It also has ventilation equipment able to purify the air inside the cabin for several hours.

In addition to the advanced protection and ability to handle up to a 4,500-kilogramme payload, the Arlan is also versatile, capable of reaching up to 120 kilometres per hour and travel a distance of 700 kilometres. The vehicle can ford at 1.2 metres and is able to climb 60-percent grades and 35-percent side slopes.

“We look forward to playing a long-term role with our partners in Kazakhstan in enhancing local capabilities and fuelling next-generation employment opportunities and economic growth in the process,” said Ichikowitz.

KPE is one of the leading defence companies in Kazakhstan and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region. The company began production of Arlan AWVs in November 2015 and presented the vehicle at the KADEX 2016 Defence Expo. Its armoured vehicle factory is one of the largest and most modern plants of its type in the region.

Paramount Group was founded in 1994.

Nation’s third peacekeeping unit starts mission in Lebanon

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The third consolidated unit of Kazakh peacekeeping forces started its operations Nov. 27 as part in the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon, reported the Ministry of Defence press service. The company consists of 120 military personnel from regional commands and the country’s Air Assault Forces.

“The first and second rotation performed their service perfectly. You participated in a special course in India. It is a great honour for me to welcome you here. Since Kazakh military personnel began to perform tasks as part of the Indian battalion, we call them not Indbatt but IndKazBatt,” said Indian battalion commander Narayan Bati in his welcoming speech.

The Kazakh peacekeeping unit, together with the Indian battalion, will patrol 16 kilometres of the Lebanese-Israeli border, the Blue Line border demarcation between the countries.

Prior to selection, military personnel undergo psychological tests, medical examinations and tests to determine their knowledge of the English language. After being chosen, they take part in three or six-month theoretical and practical training conducted by Partnership for Peace

to establish friendly relations with representatives of the peacekeeping contingent of other countries and the local population,” said a ministry spokesperson.

The third unit will remain in Lebanon until May.

The Kazakh peacekeeping unit, together with the Indian battalion, will patrol 16 kilometres of the Lebanese-Israeli border, the Blue Line border demarcation between the countries.

Prior to selection, military personnel undergo psychological tests, medical examinations and tests to determine their knowledge of the English language. After being chosen, they take part in three or six-month theoretical and practical training conducted by Partnership for Peace

Centre trainers, mine clearance centre specialists and peacekeeping instructors.

Kazakhstan is participating in the UN mission in Lebanon as part of the Indian battalion. Joint visits are expected according to the bilateral cooperation programme between the countries.

“Our military personnel visit New Delhi as part of a peacekeeping training course. At the final stage, a training group from India arrives in Kazakhstan to conduct a two-week training course. Then, the special group determines the readiness of the military personnel to participate in the mission. Personnel undergo mandatory vaccination as prescribed by the World Health Organisation,” reads the release.

The first 120-troop Kazakh peacekeeping company participated in the UN mission in Lebanon from October 2018-May 2019. A second 120-member unit remained from May-November.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is the UN peacekeeping force deployed in southern Lebanon on the border with Israel with a six-month extension in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution No. 425 of March 19, 1978.

International Turkic Writing Revival Day celebrated

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Almaty, Kyzylorda and the capital hosted International Turkic Writing Revival Day events Nov. 25, reported the Kazakh National Museum press service.

The date is linked to Danish linguist, polyglot and historian Wilhelm Thomsen’s discovery of the way to decipher ancient Turkic writing. In interpreting the words “Turk” and “Tengri” in the runic texts of the Orkhon River banks, he opened a new chapter in Turkology history.

Thomsen presented his breakthrough to the Danish Royal Academy of Sciences on Nov. 25, 1893. His work allowed foreign Turkologists to translate the manuscripts and years later Azerbaijani, Kazakh and Uzbek scientists have joined them to further explore the ancient writing.

“It was a great scientific discovery in the world of linguistics. The Russian explorer Murad

Adzhi named that date the day of the second birth of Turks. The ancient manuscripts have witnessed the high level of language culture and statehood of the Kazakh people’s distant ancestors. The ancient Turkic runic writing reflects the common ideology and presents the concept of centralised polity as the surety of liberty and independence,” said the Rukhania Janghyru (Modernisation of Kazakhstan’s Identity) Kazakh Institute of Social Development press service.

The location choice for the event was not accidental – Kazakhstan is “a sacred Shanyrak,” the centre of the Turkic world, said Uly Budun Public Association Chair and art historian Meruert Kurmangaliyeva.

“We set a goal to unite Turkic peoples, having links with many Turkologists interested in that. What can really bring together all the representatives of the Turkic world? First, we must understand that the writing is the foundation of statehood. We want all the Tur-

tic states to support us,” she said, adding Azerbaijan and Turkey also began celebrating Turkic Writing Day this year.

As specialists have noted, ancient Turkic runic inscriptions can be found in large areas of Kazakhstan, including the Ili, Irtysh, Talas, Syr Darya and Zhayik river valleys. Experts have discovered the scripts written on ceramics, carved on bronze mirrors found in the East Kazakhstan Region and inscribed on other artifacts.

The key event of the day was a flash mob, with pictures of Turks from different countries writing a few words from Kultegin’s (a great warlord) proclamation. In the future, the photos will serve as a unified appeal to all Turkic people.

The flash mob’s Internet version involved participants writing “ULU BUDUN” (“A great nation”) in runic and creatively decorating the letters. The most unusual and beautiful inscriptions were shown online throughout Turkic Writing Revival Day.

National Bank issues limited edition coins



Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh National Bank issued a limited edition coin collection Nov. 27 in denominations of 100 tenge (US\$0.26), 200 tenge (US\$0.52) and 500 tenge (US\$1.30).

The 100 and 200-tenge coins are named Kóbelek (butterfly) and the Lasiommata maera, made of nickel and silver, and are part of the flora and fauna series. The 500-tenge Quraq kórppe coins, from the Treasures of the Steppe series, are all silver.

The Quraq kórppe are named in honour of the Kazakh kurpe, patchwork bedding with a distant history. The quilts accompany Kazakhs from early childhood – first as a bright blanket to cover the baby, then as a soft carpet on which a growing person can run. Some families give kurpes as a bride’s dowry, decorating them with symbolic ornaments for a happy life.

The 500-tenge coins are manufactured with colour printing technology. The Kazakh emblem, framed with the inscription

“Qazaqstan Respublikasy – Republic of Kazakhstan,” is on the face. The denomination and information denoting the metal from which it is made, its fineness and weight are also shown. On the reverse is an image of a handmade patchwork quilt and the Quraq kórppe inscription, year and Kazakh Mint trademark.

The coin weighs 31.1 grammes, is 38.61-centimetres in diameter and of proof (higher quality) workmanship. Only 1,500 coins will be circulated.

The 100 and 200-tenge coins are lighter and smaller. Only 2,000 will be minted.

The coins are issued in souvenir packages including a numbered certificate confirming the quality of Kazakh National Bank in three languages – English, Kazakh and Russian.

The coins were produced at the Kazakh National Bank Mint and can be purchased in all its regional departments and through www.nationalbank.kz.



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Campaign against domestic violence underway in Nur-Sultan



Photo credit: zdoroviyegonoda.ru



Photo credit: UNFPA Kazakhstan

L-R: Jacky Davis, the British Embassy in Kazakhstan Secretary on Political Issues, Julia Valesc, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Kazakhstan representative and Yelena Tarasenko, member of the National Commission for Women and Family Demographic Policy under the Kazakh President.

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – The national awareness raising campaign, “16 Days Against Violence,” launched in the Kazakh capital Nov. 25. The campaign aims to promote human rights work on maternity and child care among the population, the Nur-Sultan akimat (city administration) explained on its website.

The campaign was initiated by the Nur-Sultan Police Department’s Local Police Service and UN-Women Kazakhstan with the support of Kazakh government

bodies, nongovernmental organizations and representatives of the public.

The domestic abuse situation in Kazakhstan is being intently observed by the Local Police service. They have launched a telephone hotline for people in distress, and since the beginning of the year, approximately 400 women have used it. The problems the women cite are common ones: most said they faced violence at the hands of their spouses and were unable to protect themselves. Some of them didn’t want to involve the police, for fear their husbands would be arrested,

and the help line offered their only access to psychological and moral assistance, legal advice, or even someone to simply listen to their problems.

Nur-Sultan’s Crisis Shelter Centre is another place where abused women can find support. Women and children can stay in the shelter for periods of time, receiving food, medical service and employment assistance. All the services are provided free of charge and anonymously. Those who need help can also apply for support through the centre’s 24-hour crisis line.

As part of the 16 Days campaign,

Nur-Sultan hosted a round-table discussion on the prevention of and response to violence against women, taking into account the needs of women with disabilities. The Nov. 28 event, led by the National Commission for Women and Family Demographic Policy under the Kazakh President and with technical assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Kazakhstan and financial support from the British Embassy’s Conflict Prevention, Stability and Security Fund Programme, gathered representatives of the National Commission, state entities, civil society,

religious denominations, United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan and the British Embassy. National Commission Deputy Chair Yelena Tarasenko said a new draft of Kazakhstan’s law on preventing domestic violence was making its way through the Parliament, and that it would address all forms of violence – physical, psychological, sexual and economic – and provide comprehensive preventive and inter-agency responses.

The participants discussed the results of a study on the needs of people with different kinds of disabilities to integrate their spe-

cial demands within the gender violence response mechanisms. To further explore the issue, experts analysed Kazakh legislation and state policy in the field of gender equality and protecting the rights of people with special needs. They also interviewed individuals with disabilities during their trip to the Turkestan Region and Shymkent.

The campaign continued until Dec. 10, incorporating training sessions, legal consultations and video broadcasts that promote the right of women and children to feel safe and the efforts being made to protect those rights.

Narxoz University...

Continued from Page B1

The university has launched research initiatives, including the centres for gender economics, sustainability and future studies. The administration plans to build PhD, executive education and certain master’s programmes around these research strengths to create a unique position in Eurasia.

The university is now moving from being a private joint stock company to becoming an independent, not-for-profit private university that ultimately will be supported by a combination of student tuition, research grants and projects and help from the alumni network led by the board of trustees. Narxoz aims to become a civic project like the lead-

ing private universities of the U.K. and U.S.

Wachtel addressed one of the most debated issues, that universities teach subjects that do not match employers’ needs.

“I think there is a misconception among students, parents and employers regarding what a university can and should realistically do to prepare students for the job market. Of course, all employers want to get graduates who can start to work immediately, but they really should not expect this. Why? For one thing, a university course is four years long. If you ask employers whether they could have predicted, five years ago, what specific skills and knowledge they would need now, if they are honest, they will tell you that

they could not have done so. That is, given the pace of change, it is impossible to design a programme today that will produce exactly the kinds of graduates that will be needed by a given business in five years. To try to do so is a fool’s errand,” he said.

There is a need to produce what companies are really seeking – trainable employees who have the qualities and fundamental skills. Companies can then quickly and easily slot young people into their work forces and retrain them as necessary.

“To be sure, if companies want to work directly with us, we can co-design internship opportunities for students after their third year. If a student begins to work in a given company at that point,

the specific training the company needs can start then and if the company is willing to promise employment after graduation, the process of adaptation can happen much more quickly. We are very open to working with companies in Almaty and beyond on this basis,” he noted.

Narxoz University, established in 1963 as the Alma-Ata Institute of National Economy, was rebranded and renamed in 2016. It is famous for its strategic cooperation with key stakeholders and anti-corruption, directed strategic planning policy. The university became the first TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies) project grant holder among Central Asian universities.

Interference by relatives most common factor in divorce – study

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Interfering relatives and a lack of moral restrictions were cited as the most common causes of divorce among Kazakh couples, a study published Nov. 28 by the Kazakh Institute for Equal Rights and Opportunities found.

“Kazakhstan has a high divorce rate; however, there is also statistical data on high marriage rates. This means that young Kazakhs are ready to marry but, unfortunately, every third marriage falls apart in Kazakhstan,” said Tatiana Rezvushkina, a sociologist who worked on the project.

Interference by relatives in couples’ relationships was named as a factor in their divorce by 61 percent of respondents, while 41 percent cited a lack of moral restrictions. Slightly more than a quarter, 25.2 percent, also said the ease of getting a divorce factored into their split.

“Reasons vary. First of all, the attitude towards family and marriage is changing. Previously, families were created for kinship and economic reasons – today everyone tries to find in family and marriage so-called psychological comfort, psychological safety... When people don’t find that in marriage or it’s lost, people get divorced,” said Rezvushkina.

Traditional gender roles also play a part in Kazakhstan’s high divorce rates, she noted.

“There are a lot of traditional prescriptions regarding a wife’s role in the family in Kazakhstan: how the wife should be caring; attentive to the children but also to work. This is called the double shift. Domestic labour is unpaid, it’s mundane, routine, not paid and not noticed by anyone. This frequently causes doing daily tasks to feel pointless to women, and for women not to want to do them all on their own,” she continued.

“Men are prescribed to be breadwinners... In the capitalist economy, it’s very difficult – the competition is high on the labour market, economic crises. Men frequently lose their jobs or can’t find good jobs. Correspondingly, women blame them for their inability to provide,” the researcher explained.

As for what they would deem sufficient grounds for divorce, 45.7 percent of respondents cited a lack of understanding, 45.3 percent named infidelity and 20.6 percent indicated the absence of children.

“We should popularise counselling, especially family counselling. Sooner or later any family has crises and people stop paying attention to each other, because of mundane, constant problems. So, frequently, family therapists help to repair the relationships, to help people see in their partners interesting and important people. But, unfortunately, our people are cautious about the therapists, thinking only those with mental illnesses can use their services, confusing therapists with psychiatrists,” Rezvushkina commented on what can be done to curb divorce rates in the country.

The survey also asked about violence in the homes. Among respondents, domestic violence was most often committed against women, 44.2 percent, and children, 26.9 percent. The elderly are also frequently subjected to violence, at 16.6 percent. Men are subjected to violence less frequently, at 6.5 percent.

The most common form of violence is physical violence, with 74.8 percent of respondents indicating it; 66.9 percent were subjected to psychological violence, and 27.3 percent to sexual violence.

Respondents consider criminal punishment to be the most effective measure to combat violence, with 60.6 percent in favour of criminal punishments for domestic violence. Nearly 31 percent said a fine would be sufficient, and 24 percent spoke in favour of consultations with a psychologist.

The study involved 17 types of families, classified as large families, single-parent families, families with disabled children and other groupings. Urban population made up 62.5 percent of respondents, with the remainder coming from rural areas. A variety of age groups and ethnicities were also included. More than three quarters of respondents, 77.6 percent, were women; 22.4 percent are men. The study was conducted from June to November in 14 regions of Kazakhstan.

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TOURISM

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Kazakh Tourism launches tour for Chinese travel bloggers



Photo credit: qaztourism.kz

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Thirteen of China's most influential travel, lifestyle, fashion and shopping bloggers and public opinion leaders arrived in Almaty Nov. 13 to tell their followers about Kazakhstan.

The tour, initiated by Kazakh Tourism with the support of Capital Partners Real Estate and Air Astana, the nation's largest carrier, was aimed at highlighting the country, particularly Almaty and the Almaty Region, as an ideal destination for Chinese travellers.

The decision to invite them was

not a random one. According to global data, Chinese tourists spend approximately \$280 billion on travel, including winter tourism, which is actively promoted by popular bloggers.

The Chinese visitors spent their first day sightseeing in the city, becoming acquainted with the people, culture and customs and tasting traditional food – kurt (yogurt or cheese), kazy (horse meat bratwurst), koumiss (fermented mare's milk), besbarmak (meat and noodles) and bairsak (fried bread). They also had the option of visiting Esentai Mall, a luxury emporium positioned by the organisers as the best shopping location in the Central Asian region, with prices 25 percent lower than similar malls in Dubai, Milan and Moscow.

The next day, the bloggers travelled by helicopter to Charyn Canyon, also known as Valley of Castles or Red Canyon, a ride which afforded them a bird's-eye view of the landscape. After a guided walk along the canyon, the guests were treated to a lunch of national dishes and photo shoot with batyrs (steppe warriors) and girls dressed in traditional garb. That evening, Kazakh Tourism organised a gala dinner to officially greet the visitors.

Chinese citizens are permitted to stay in Kazakhstan for three days under the 72-hour visa free regime. The final day the travellers visited Shymbulak Mountain

Resort, where they enjoyed views of the Zailiyskiy Alatau mountains and photographed golden eagles.

"I want to live here forever! It is only the third day of my stay in Almaty, but it seems I have spent the entire week having so many activities, meeting new friends, eating so much delicious food! I plan to bring my parents here next spring. I've heard it is the best time to visit Almaty," said Zuo Ensyao, who with 3.7 million followers, is one of the China's most popular fashion and travel influencers.

Syao Sayesha, who counts more than two million followers, agreed with her colleague, sensing Chinese tourists would appreciate learning more about the history of the Silk Road and seeing the ancient Kazakh cities and mausoleums first-hand.

"The next time I arrive here I will try to see more, to explore Kazakhstan deeper," she noted.

To attract Chinese tourists, the Ministry of Culture and Sport intends to extend the visa free transit stay up to 120 hours. The five-day period will allow visitors the opportunity to travel to several cities or tourist destinations.

Last year, Kazakh Tourism invited four bloggers to visit Almaty, Shymkent and the East Kazakhstan Region. The travellers spent nine days in Kazakhstan, expressing their emotions online in videos and social media posts followed by 145 million viewers.

Kazakh Schengen visa applications increase 26% since 2016



By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Schengen visa applications from Kazakh citizens have increased 26 percent in the last two years, reported Schengen Visa Info.

After a five-year low of 124,735 applications in 2016, Kazakh passport holders have increased the number to 157,608, the highest indicator in the last half-decade. According to the most recent Schengen Visa statistics, embassies in Kazakhstan processed approximately 160,000 applications in 2018, of which 149,575 were approved.

Schengen refers to the European Union (EU) passport-free zone covering most of the union's member states. A Schengen visa allows a person to travel to any of its 26 member countries for up to a 90-day tourism or business stay.

The number of short-term visa applications filed at the Schengen embassies in Kazakhstan increased in relation to the worldwide number of applications received, noted Schengen Visa Info expert Ella Worehead.

"The number of applications received at the embassies and consulates in Kazakhstan has not marked drastic changes except for the one decrease in 2016, which compared to 2014 and 2018, was about a 25 percent decrease and increase, respectively. Yet, if we look at the overall number of Schengen applications worldwide, the lowest number of applications was filed in 2016, in the same year that applications from Kazakhstan hit the lowest as well," she said.

Kazakh applications increased again in 2018 to approximately

6 percent more than 2014, she added. The launch of European low-cost flights from Nur-Sultan Airport and removal of Kazakh airlines from the European air safety list allowing them to fly to Europe were among the main reasons for the increase.

More than 40,700 applications received multiple-entry approval, permitting the visa holder to enter the Schengen zone more than once using the same visa without exceeding the permitted number of days of stay.

The proportion of rejected applications has increased. While only 2.2 percent were denied in 2014, the percentage more than doubled in 2018 to 4.8 percent.

The German consulates in Kazakhstan saw the highest number of visa applications, with 40,829 requests received.

The number of short-term visa applications filed at the Schengen embassies in Kazakhstan increased in relation to the worldwide number of applications received, noted Schengen Visa Info expert Ella Worehead.

Italy is also a favourite Schengen-area country for Kazakh visitors. The Italian consulate was second to Germany in receiving 20,009 applications. Of those submitted, 1,185 were refused.

Baikonur to be designated free economic zone

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – A free economic zone will be created at the Baikonur Cosmodrome to attract tourists to the world's first and largest operational space launch facility, Kyzylorda Region Akim (Governor) Kuanyshbek Iskakov told KazInform news agency Nov. 22.

"We have already developed the concept of a free economic zone. One of the aims of the free economic zone is the development of tourism. There are tourist and entertainment zones, which are included in the map of top 10 tourist priority destinations of our republic. As you know, Baikonur is a closed city and tourism is not developed there," he said.

The akimat (city administration) is planning to build hotels, museums, pavilions and rocket observation platforms.

"I think that there will be favourable conditions for the creation of tourism. New facilities will be built, new hotels meeting international standards, museums, pa-

vilions, observation platforms for space rocket flights and others," he added.

The Baikonur development project, planned for 2021-2046, includes improving the area's tourism, entertainment and industrial potential, noted Kyzylorda Region Department of Industrial and Innovative Development head Rinat Sultangereyev Nov. 25, according to caravan.kz.

"The project implementation pe-

riod is 25 years, from 2021 to 2046. The priority areas here are the creation of the Baikonur international spaceport, the Baikonur entertainment and tourist zone and the organisation of industrial production. As a part of the development of the tourism potential of Baikonur, following the example of the successful development of space tourism at Cape Canaveral, a concept for creating an entertainment and tourist zone was developed," he said.

Funding for a feasibility study, the initial stage of the project, will be allocated from the regional budget.

"Seventy-six million tenge (US\$196,764) was allocated from the regional budget for the development of a feasibility study for the project. On the territory of the entertainment and tourist zones, there are plans to locate objects of entertainment and educational purposes to create the most comfortable conditions for the development of small and medium-sized businesses," said Sultangereyev.

Creating the free economic zone is aimed towards developing the industrial and innovative potential of Kazakhstan and Russia, he noted.

"The creation of a free economic zone corresponds to priority directions of economic development of Kazakhstan and Russia. The main objectives of the project are the development of industrial and innovative potential, including the field of space activities," he added.



Photo credit: KazInform

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Yessil Winter Festival draws winter sports fans, competitors in Nur-Sultan

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – The Yessil Winter Festival took place Nov. 30 in the Kazakh capital. The city hopes to popularise winter sports among its residents with the festival, according to the Nur-Sultan akimat (city administration) website.

The festival was part of other celebrations of the Day of the First President and was initiated by the Yessil District akimat, the Cross Country Skiing Federation of Kazakhstan and the Specialised Children and Young People's Sport School No. 2.

The event also marked the start of ski season, and began with ski competitions in Nur-Sultan's Capital Park. Approximately 100 participants competed in the cross-country skiing races, supported by honoured athletes who came to watch.



2010 Winter Olympic Biathlon silver medalist Yelena Khrustaleva, skier and Master of Sport Mark Starostin and ice skater Yekaterina Aidova came to the park to congratulate participants and run the race with them. Yessil District Akim (Mayor) Berik Dzhakenov also joined the competition.

Participants were divided into eight groups according to their age, and could compete in one, three or five-kilometre races. All participants were provided equipment for the competition by Ski Club Astana, a sports outfitter and equipment rental company.

Winners in various categories were awarded diplomas, medals and certificates to buy sporting equipment. The youngest and oldest participants were also singled out for awards.

City officials noted Nur-Sultan is working to draw its residents

toward sports in a variety of ways, including building football pitches and workout and play areas in city parks and establishing sport gyms and fitness centres.

Approximately 100 participants competed in the cross-country skiing races, supported by honoured athletes who came to watch.

The Yessil District administration plans to build several winter recreation areas, including a ski-trail and a skating rink.

According to data provided by the city, more than 29 percent of Nur-Sultan residents engage in sport.

Kazakhstan plans seven new sports facilities to promote athletics

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Training coaches, investing in regional facilities and a fair sports culture are important for developing Kazakh athletics, said World Athletics President Sebastian Coe during a Nov. 3 press conference in the capital.

“There are two or three topics that we discussed. The first is the training of coaches, because this is a key moment for the development of sports. The second is the government investment in all regions of Kazakhstan,” he said regarding his discussion with Prime Minister Askar Mamin.

“Now, we are ready to move on

to discuss activities in new facilities. We will create conditions for the development of sports through these sports events. Another area that is also very important is the support of a culture of fair sports. It is important that we have the right trainers with the right principles, professionals who understand that you can achieve the result without using dishonest methods. It inspires me that your sports representatives understand this. Already in Nur-Sultan, I became a fan of the Barys hockey team. This is my new (favourite) hockey club,” he explained.

Mamin, who agreed new investment is necessary to help promote sports, noted the country is con-

structing seven new athletic centres.

“The popularisation of sports, including athletics, is an important area of our policy. In Kazakhstan, seven leading athletic centres are under construction – in Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Pavlodar, Aktobe, Taldykorgan, Atyrau and Ust-Kamenogorsk – which will contribute to the further cultivation of this sport,” he said.

Despite some significant growth in sports' popularity and profitability, the priority is making them more attractive to young people, said Coe.

“The Doha World Cup attracted more spectators than previous world tournaments. The largest sponsors in history are involved in track and

field athletics. A contract for 10 years was signed for the Diamond League with a company from China. Of course, we must continue to work to make changes in our sports and attract young people. We cannot stand still. The main challenge for us is to encourage the younger generation to play sports,” said Coe.

He praised the government's actions regarding further athletic development.

“I have had a busy last 24 hours in Kazakhstan. You have provided me with unique opportunities for meetings not only with leaders of sports organisations, but also with representatives of the political leadership. I was glad to see agreement in the programme on the development of athletics. I see the readiness of your federation for the challenges that our sports have. On the part of the prime minister, we saw very strong support for investing in infrastructure for the future of athletics and preparing training programmes for trainers,” he added.

Athlete wins gold at UAE Jiu-jitsu Championship

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh athlete Moldir Mekenbayeva won a gold medal at the World Professional Adult and Para Jiu-jitsu Championship Nov. 16-24 in Abu Dhabi.

“This year, the world championship's organisation was in the hands of the Jiu-Jitsu Federation of the United Arab Emirates. Who else but Arabs knows how to conduct competitions at the highest level. The Emirates, Abu Dhabi, Mubadala Arena, Rotana Hotel – it smelled of seriousness. A clear schedule, responsive volunteers, arena, warm up, tatami, fair judges, lights, cameras, you and your opponent,” she told The Astana Times.

Mekenbayeva participated in the adult female (52 kilogrammes) ne-waza category, where the main objective is to transfer the fight to the ground.

“In fact, I felt all the joy only when I was standing on the pedestal, holding my hand on my heart, singing the Kazakh anthem. Only then did I realise that hard work could achieve any goal. I cannot convey in words what I felt. Perhaps, this is happiness,” she said.

Mekenbayeva had an automatic pass in the first round due to her previous victories. A gold medal in the Nur-Sultan Grand Prix (Kazakhstan), silver medal in the Asian Championship 2019 (Mongolia) and silver medal at the World Combat Games (South Korea) put her in first place in the Ju-Jitsu International Federation (JJIF) rating, which gave her a pass to the second round.

Mekenbayeva competed against Canada's Jessica McNeill, a black belt in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and 2017 world champion (55 kilogrammes), in the second round.

“After the first grapples, your breathing normalises and you are

already entering a state of cold mind, doing everything possible to defeat your opponent,” she said.

Her third fight was against Sweden's Linda Lindstrom, an experienced black belt. Lindstrom beat a Polish athlete, the 2017 world champion and reigning champion in the United World Wrestling (UWW) grappling section, in her first round.

Mekenbayeva met Russia's Polina Krupskaya in the finals.

“The responsibility was insane, because that day in the ne-waza section I was the only one who could possibly win gold. Before the finals, I had the time to prepare, but waiting is the most painful. I could not afford to surrender mentally or psychologically, as I treaded a thorny and difficult path to my goal. I remembered how I spent nights at the library studying to pass exams right before the departure and pass the remaining ones after the arrival. I trained as hard as I could, not minding the fatigue. I rigidly set priorities and my schedule, limiting myself in many ways,” she said.

She finished the fight with a chokehold.

“I knew and felt that in that moment everyone – my family, friends and the whole of Kazakhstan – expected that medal from me. In an instant, I was already on the tatami and the first grabs went. Not bewildered, I immediately scrolled my game plan in my head. A couple of minutes and the opponent was already giving up. I was at a loss; I could not believe it. I won,” she said.

Twelve other Kazakh athletes won medals, putting the country seventh in the medal statistics. Rustem Asherbekov, Yeldos Kambdenov and Mekenbayeva took gold; Islam Mamilov, Darkhan Nortayev and Zhenis Nurlybaev captured silver and the rest were bronze.

FC Astana beats Manchester United



Photo credit: /astana.kz

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Astana Football Club beat the U.K.'s Manchester United 2-1 Nov. 28 in a Europa League fifth group match in the capital. The win was Astana's first in the Europa League.

“People create an atmosphere, so we must win. Thank God that we were able to repay the debt. I want to say thanks to them for this,” said Astana head coach Roman Grigor-

chuk after the match, according to vesti.kz.

Manchester United's Jessi Lingard team scored the first goal at the 10-minute mark, which was answered by Astana's Dmitri Shomko in the 55th minute. The outcome was decided on a pass by Astana's Antonio Rukavino, however, when Manchester United goalkeeper Di'Shon Bernard scored an own goal at the 66-minute mark.

“In the first half, we had flaws. I told the players that the segment

when we were deeply defending... We scored a goal after the moment when we illogically played a corner. They were great that they were not upset but began to play better. Today, I can only say good things about my team... A conversation took place during the break, where we recalled what we talked about before and explained that we could win this match,” he added.

Manchester United, with two wins and a draw preceding the Astana match, scored enough points to qualify for the playoff before the game. Astana lost two matches before playing Manchester United, but the win did not help the team qualify for the playoffs.

Manchester United Head Coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted the team's performance declined throughout the match, noting many players were new to the game and the match was the debut for three members.

“I thought the three young boys who started the game were excellent and the only part I wasn't hap-

py with was the ten minutes when they scored their two goals. You could tell the pressure was coming. These boys need men's football; they got a taste of it tonight,” he said, according to telegraph.co.uk.

Manchester United's lack of experience was observed by those in the stands.

“A conversation took place during the break, where we recalled what we talked about before and explained that we could win this match.”

“When United still had strengths, they attacked in the first half of the match. But later the lack of experience showed itself and our players showed them,” said Astana fan Baku after the game.

Balandin wins gold, silver...

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Wilson won the silver of the 100 breaststroke race, finishing in 59.54, while Miller took the bronze in 59.92.

Adilbek Mussin also took part to represent Kazakhstan at the tournament.

Balandin, 24, won gold at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, where he became Kazakhstan's first ever Olympic swimming medalist in the 200-metre breaststroke. This was also his best time in the 200 breaststroke, 2:07.46.

Balandin updated Kazakh-



Photo credit: olympic.kz

stan's records in both the 100 and 200-metre breaststrokes at the 2014 Asian Games, going three-for-three. Balandin earned the Speedo Performance of the Week at the Asian Games for his performance in the 200-metre breaststroke.

The Kazakh breaststroke swimmer skipped the men's 200 breaststroke at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta while recovering from injury. Yet he competed in 50 and 100.

“He had a recent injury and a recent recovery so his coach decided not to risk his health in the 200,” Balandin's spokesman told Reuters.



Moldir Mekenbayeva (left of centre) along with the other winners.

CAPITAL

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2019

Ring road opens around Nur-Sultan, car engine heating project launches

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The 87-kilometre ring road opened around the capital Nov. 29 will increase transport system efficiency, reduce travel time by raising the speed limit and improve the city's environment.

Prime Minister Askar Mamin, who attended the opening ceremony, noted safe and high-quality road projects are being implemented in the centre-south, centre-east and centre-west directions. The highways will provide north-south and east-west passage.

"Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev and head of state Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pay special attention to the development of the capital. Today is an important event. We open this



road as part of the development of the transport infrastructure of the city," he said.

With an eye towards the cold weather, the city administration, with the support of the Asian Development Bank, launched the car engine block heating project based on Finnish technology. The innovative idea is expected to have a positive effect on the environment and ease services for drivers.

"The main objective of the project is to improve the environment in our city. The technology of electric engine pre-heating allows car owners to reduce fuel consumption and reduce carbon emissions. The engine will always be in a warm condition – no need to waste time and warm up. I believe that this is only the beginning of a joint project. We selected



several districts for the installation of this equipment. A device will be installed in each district soon. Equipment can be used in the future for electric cars," said capital Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov.

More than 350,000 cars are registered in the city. In the winter, residents often start their vehicles in advance to heat the engine and passenger area, leading to excessive fuel consumption,

cost, engine wear and greenhouse gas emissions.

The two-part technology consists of a power plant and equipment installed in the car that connects to an electric column (electric heater). The features can be installed after-market by a certified specialist or included as a new car option.

The equipment will be mounted in seven parking areas and the project is expected to launch in other cities in the future.

Public discussion, maintenance and communication are key to saving Nur-Sultan's architectural heritage, says prominent architect

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Public discussion, building maintenance and communication are necessary to save the capital's archaeological heritage, said former Tselinograd (Soviet name of Nur-Sultan) Region head architect and SA Architects Creative Director Vasily Toskin at the Nov. 27 public discussion organised by the Fading.TSE project.

"Well, the idea of this gathering has emerged, because recently journalists started coming and

started asking questions that differ from the ones they asked a year ago, and the analysis led us to thinking and listening about this topic," he said.

"Young people come and say that this is bad in our city and that is bad. A foreign journalist came and said that our benches are different. So, there is this disproportion of opinions that our city is bad and everything that was done was bad. I ask them why did you come to me? Because I am a part of it. Because we all can travel to different cities now and see that our city is no worse than any other ones

and in some aspects it's even better than others," he explained.

"In principle, our city has its face. Somehow it's formed, but we can't say all is bad. But it's like in the family – we want everything at once and we have neither the time, nor money, nor skills to do everything at once," the architect said.

Toskin opened the lecture by discussing his work as the Tselinograd Region's head architect. He emphasised the importance of dialogue between the government and architects facilitated by the person in that post and expressed his wish for strengthening the dialogue,

with architects feeling free to meet the city head architect. He also noted the hope for more consideration to be given to senior architects to maintain the city's architectural integrity.

He spoke about existing architectural Soviet legacy objects such as the House of the Youth (currently called Zhastar – youth in Kazakh) and the role of proper maintenance and commercialisation in keeping these objects intact.

Toskin also highlighted the need for public dialogue in making decisions regarding architectural heritage. He talked about the House of

Rites, the building that contained the largest stained glass window in the Eurasian region and was an integral part of the city, which was demolished due to public indifference and a lack of awareness.

"The House of Rites is an example. We need to make its demise not empty, but in the name of something," said Violetta Toskina, SA Architects projects head architect.

She added the firm plans to hold a larger scale discussion with architectural experts and the capital akimat (administration) regarding the city's key architectural decisions.

Public discussion participants

noted they gained quite a bit from the talks.

"We were able to learn some new information that was hidden from our eyes before. I myself work in archives and I saw Vasily Viktorovich's name in the relocation documents many times," said one of the guests.

The meeting was held as part of the Fading.TSE retrospective of the capital research project with the support of the Soros Foundation Kazakhstan in partnership with Kazakhstan Academic Centre MA'AM-Eurasia, SA Architects and Urban Forum Kazakhstan.

Inclusion support office opens at school



By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – The inclusion support office opened Nov. 27 at new school-lyceum No. 88 is the sixth under the Every Child Deserves a School project launched by the Bolashak Corporate Foundation, reported the capital akimat (city administration) website.

"Students (with special needs) now have the possibility to study with their peers and receive the necessary individual support without interrupting the learning process," said foundation Board of Trustees Chair Dinara Chaizhunnusova at the presentation.

The opening was sponsored by Chevron, which has been operating in Kazakhstan for nearly 26 years.

"Our enterprise supports medical institutions and implements international standards. In addition, we introduce the local specialists to the best global practices. This is our contribution to the social and economic development of Kazakhstan," said company representative Zhanar Kosphanova.

Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev and capital Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov were present to get acquainted with the new school and the inclusion office's potential.

The delegation examined the

hydroponics study room and three-in-one room, a unique physics, chemistry and biology laboratory invented by the Kozmo. Drom educational project. While inspecting the school, Saparbayev noted the importance of cooperation among state and public organisations and foreign enterprises in realising social projects aimed at supporting children with disabilities.

"Our children have all the opportunities to study. This school is equipped with up-to-date facilities and the start-ups are applying their best innovative projects here. To date, much attention has been given to the development of education," he told the teachers and administration.

He added officials are taking specific measures to improve teacher status and are anticipating their impact in raising a worthy generation of Kazakh citizens.

Kulginov noted he appreciated the efforts of the project initiators and promised inclusion offices will soon be opened in other city schools.

"The new school is one of the best – a special thanks to the Chevron company for its cooperation and support. Work hard for the sake of knowledge – we are providing all the conditions for this," he told the school's first students.

Thousands of people visit annual Christmas Charity Bazaar for cultural exchange, goodwill

Continued from Page B1

The Ambassadors Spouses Astana (ASA) Association has been organising this event since 2008 to raise money for charity. The association uses the funds raised to support projects that make positive changes in the daily lives of low-income families, children with disabilities from all parts of Kazakhstan.

"You get such a great joy just from the fact that by buying things you are doing charity. I'd like to say a big thanks to the organisers," said Turlabekova.

The bazaar raised approximately \$97,692 in 2018 and \$92,994 this year.

"People are buying and buying everything. I think today there are more people than last year," said ASA President Luzia Sebesta Schmid.

A part of the bazaar's fame is the annual Grand Raffle that offered a Lada Granta car provided by the Russian Embassy, travel vouchers to numerous destinations, luxury accommodations and designer



ASA President Luzia Sebesta Schmid (C) cuts the red ribbon at the opening of the 12th annual Christmas Charity Bazaar.

clothes among 231 prizes from the bazaar's 87 sponsors.

This year the association printed out 10,000 raffle tickets that were sold out. Some people came

from other cities to participate. It was also a chance to increase the public awareness about being environmentally responsible. The organisers provided sorting bins for

plastic, paper and food waste. The British Embassy in Kazakhstan gave first thousand people "No plastic it's fantastic" cotton bags to do shopping.

Storm sewer problem to be fully solved by 2030

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The capital will be outfitted with a complete drainage system by 2030, said Marhabat Zhayymbetov, Chairman of the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development's Committee for Construction, Housing and Utilities.

His comments came during the Water Security of Kazakhstan: State, Problems and Recommendations parliamentary hearings, where Senator Yedil Mamytkov asked what measures the government was taking to ensure

the city is protected from floodwaters.

"Every spring, the capital turns into 'steppe Venice.' Floodwaters flood streets and houses and at this time some citizens manage to sail boats on those streets where there is a storm sewer. On the outskirts of the city, the situation is generally disastrous. What is being done to prevent such situations; what prevents the normal functioning of storm sewers?" he asked.

Zhayymbetov noted the sewers are expected to work properly by 2030.

"In the next five years, according to the comprehensive devel-

opment of the city of Nur-Sultan, there are plans to allocate about 40 billion tenge (US\$103.7 million) more and double the coverage [of the drainage system]. This means that if now 13,000 hectares are covered, it will be 26,000, and the catchment area of the city of Nur-Sultan occupies 34,000 hectares. We will do it as funds are allocated, though we know that until 2030 is a long time. If the government will allocate 184 billion tenge (US\$476.9 million), the entire territory of the city could be covered by the water catchment," he said.

He noted 44 billion tenge

(US\$114 million) has been earmarked for the work in the last eight years.

"In 2012, we developed a feasibility study showing that 184 billion tenge (US\$476.9 million) is the necessary sum for the drainage system to cover the whole city. During 2011-2019, 44 billion tenge (US\$114 million) was allocated. What has been done? Now, the catchment area covers 13,000 hectares, which is nine times more than in 2011. We have built 380 kilometres of storm sewers, 14 new treatment facilities and three storage ponds," he added.