

Government commissions Saryarka gas pipeline



Photo credit: The Kazakh Ministry of Energy press service.

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh government completed the construction and commissioning of the Saryarka gas pipeline Dec. 27, reported the Ministry of Energy’s press service.

The pipeline, which starts in the Kyzylorda Region, will provide domestic gas to Karaganda, the capital, Temirtau and Zhezkazgan and nearly 2.7 million people in 171 settlements along its route will have access to natural gas, the release noted.

The government ensured maximum involvement of local manufacturers during construction.

KazStroyService was the main contractor among domestic companies, Bemer Armature Kazakhstan provided shutoff valves and crane assemblies and Batys Munai Gas Zhabdyktary supplied automated gas distribution stations.

“It should be noted that the implementation of the project will bring a multiplier effect and will give impetus to the development of small and medium-sized businesses, which form the basis of economic prosperity for the regions located along the gas pipelines, as well as our capital,” said the statement.

The construction launch ceremony for main pipeline was held in December 2018, equipment and people

mobilisation began the following month and welding works started last March. More than 1,000 units of equipment and approximately 2,000 employees were involved.

“The 1,061.3 kilometres of gas pipeline and five units of the most powerful automated gas distribution stations, as well as a gas measuring station, were built in a significantly short time. This indicates the coordination of work and the high professional preparedness of our specialists and the innovativeness of the technologies used in the process,” said the ministry.

Using natural gas as a fuel is among the government’s main tasks, as it will reduce pollutant emissions

into the atmosphere, create more comfortable living conditions for the population and help improve the environmental situation.

“The arrival of natural gas in the central and northern regions of the country is a significant historical event for the country,” it added.

First President Nursultan Nazarbayev ordered constructing the gas pipeline as part of the Five Social Initiatives in his special state-of-the-nation in March 2018. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also instructed “timely completion of the construction of the Saryarka gas pipeline” as part of his election programme, which focused on social wellbeing.

Icing believed to be most likely cause of Dec. 27 Bek Air crash

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – A Kazakh government commission assessing the Dec. 27 crash of a Bek Air plane near Almaty has found icing to be the most likely cause of the accident, Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar told a Jan. 10 Central Communication Service press briefing.

The Bek Air Fokker 100 plane collided with a two-storey building near Almaty Dec. 27, killing 12 people out of almost 100 on board, including the captain. The commission has investigated four possible causes of the crash: commercial loading errors that affected aircraft centring; external factors like icing, weather conditions or satellite delays; pilot error; and aircraft failure.

“The probability of ice deposition on the surface of the aircraft, which had been parked for about

two days under weather conditions... is not excluded,” Sklyar said, reported kursiv.kz. “Thus, taking into account the studied meteorological information and analysis of the parametric data of the flight recorder, the main theory of the crash is the icing of the aircraft theory.”

The aircraft was only partially treated with anti-icing liquid before the flight. The aircraft commander decided to treat only the stabiliser with anti-icing liquid, not the wings, Sklyar said.

The commission continues to work with the Interstate Aviation Committee, specialists and the Netherlands Authorised Accident Investigation Authority.

According to Sklyar, the commission ruled out errors in commercial loading and aircraft centring because the wind in the strip was steady at a speed of one to two metres per second.

“Under these conditions,

based on the direction and speed of the wind, the time interval between take-off aircraft, and this was 110 seconds, under these conditions, the satellite track has calculatedly shifted to the left by a distance of at least 50 metres from the runway. Accordingly, it could not have influenced the emergence and development of a special situation,” Sklyar said.

There were no reports of wind shear from another aircraft taking off Dec. 27, he added.

The commission hasn’t found evidence of an aircraft malfunction or abnormal operation of aircraft and engine systems, but work continues and the investigation might take more than a year, Sputniknews.kz reports.

Sklyar also read a portion of the conversation between the pilots before the crash. At 7:20 a.m. 10 seconds after take-off, the second pilot reduced the engine operating

mode and tried to stop the flight. The right roll of the aircraft began to develop.

Aircraft Commander (AC): What happened?

Co-pilot: I do not know what happened, a stabiliser, slow down, *profanity* (the co-pilot is probably shifting the engine control levers to idle).

AC: No need, what are you doing?! Let’s go, go, go!

(probably the commander moves the control levers to take-off mode).

AC: Remove the chassis.

At a height of five metres, the cleaning of the chassis began,” Sklyar read the transcribed conversation.

The Fokker 100 airplane’s airworthiness certificate was issued in May 2019. The plane that crashed was built April 9, 1996, in the Netherlands. The Kazakh Aviation Administration suspended Bek Air’s airworthiness Dec. 27.



Photo credit: Kazakh Emergency Situations Committee.

UNDP, Bitfury to create Pavlodar forestland as Kazakhstan’s first carbon reducing initiative

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Bitfury, the world’s leading blockchain company, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will be the first big business to compensate for its carbon footprint in Kazakhstan. The two entities will sign an agreement in late January with the nation’s Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources to create a forestland in the Pavlodar Region.

Kazakhstan must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent in the next decade to meet its pledge in the 2016 Paris Agreement.

The agreement and UN Sustain-

able Development Goals indicate moving towards sustainable and low carbon consumption will require significant investment and innovation from both the government and private sector. UNDP in Kazakhstan and Bitfury agreed Dec. 12 to conserve and increase the nation’s forestland.

“This is the first carbon reduction initiative for Kazakhstan and we hope that it will accelerate the country’s efforts to reduce carbon dioxide in partnership with the private sector. These practical solutions will require institutionalisation and expansion,” said Yakup Beris, UNDP Resident Representative in Kazakhstan, reported the UNDP press service.

Continued on Page A2

Government approves new draft Ecology Code to toughen penalties for environmental offenses

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The government approved a new draft Ecology Code during the Dec. 24 government meeting chaired by Prime Minister Askar Mamin.

The Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources developed the draft considering the experience of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and opinions from the Kazakh public and business community. The ministry included many of the more than 2,000 suggestions received during the public discussion of the bill.

The code has seven principles. The ‘polluter pays and fixes’ prin-

ciple will control large company emissions with fines and responsibility for environmental damage. The fines will gradually double, quadruple and eventually, increase eight-fold.

The second principle will reduce the number of first category enterprises obliged to undergo environmental impact assessment (EIA) to 2,600. The businesses account for 80 percent of emissions.

The existing code, which has been covering almost all enterprises (nearly 19,000), proved itself “ineffective and impractical,” said Minister of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources Magzum Mirzagaliev while presenting the draft.

Continued on Page A4

Baiterek Holding creates venture capital fund, pursues long-term construction projects in 2020

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Baiterek National Managing Holding, the Kazakh government’s key financial agent, will continue to pursue its long-term goals this year. It ended 2019 included in the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) rating and creating a venture capital fund.

As of Dec. 30, the Fitch Rating of BBB confirmed the holding was responsible for the country’s diversification and sustainable economic growth with a stable outlook.

Baiterek’s subsidiary organisations, Development Bank of Kazakhstan (DBK) and Kazyna Capital Management (KCM), support long-term financing for infrastructure and manufacturing investment projects, Chair Aidar Arifkhanov told The Astana Times. KCM is financing the Makinski poultry farm and construction of a meat factory

and the first start-up wind farm complex in the Akmol Region.

DBK is providing seven billion tenge (US\$18.37 million) in loan funds for up to 20 years. The bank also prioritises “transport, logistics, communications and energy, including green energy,” he said.

“Currently, DBK is the leading bank in the country for long-term lending to the non-oil economy. At the end of 2018, the share of DBK’s long-term lending to the manufacturing industry and infrastructure amounted to 46 percent of the total loans issued by all banks,” he added.

The bank’s loan portfolio is 1.6 trillion tenge (US\$4.24 billion). DBK’s major strategic projects include building the Aktobe rail and beam plant, Shymkent transformer factory, ferroalloy plant in the Karaganda Region, transport and logistics centre in the Turkestan Region, the Aktau seaport and Saryarka gas pipeline.

Continued on Page A7

INSIDE

NATION

After Bek Air crash, survivors helped each other, locals rushed to offer aid **A2**

Aviation Administration to modernise standards **A2**

ECONOMY

Exports fell 4.5 percent in 2019 **A4**

Kazakhstan mandates online cash registers starting in 2020 **A4**

EDITORIAL&OPINION

With reforms on the way, coming decade looks positive for Kazakhstan **A6**

MYRZALIEV: Turkestan becomes centre of investments and business activity **A6**

BUSINESS

MOST Youth Incubator supports Central Asian, youth startups **A7**

Shymkent to launch third industrial zone in 2020 **A8**

NATION&CAPITAL

Kazakh anti-nuclear anthem inspires activists across languages, decades **B1**

Lonely Planet names Central Asia 2020’s best travel region **B6**

NATION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

After Bek Air crash, survivors helped each other, locals rushed to offer aid

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – In face of chaos and tragedy immediately after a Bek Air plane crashed Dec. 27, survivors, locals and emergency services worked together to help those injured in the accident. “Our people once more showed their unity and readiness to help each other,” tweeted Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

The relatives of survivor Gulim Akisheva, who is five months pregnant, publicly thanked fellow passenger Temirlan Kadauov. Kadauov covered Akisheva with his own body and helped her get out of the plane.

The crash took 12 lives, including captain of the aircraft Marat Muratbayev, and another 50 out of the 95 passengers and five crew members were injured in the accident. The survivors helped each other get out the plane. “I think that the men did a good job – they acted heroically in the sense that they supported women, children,” Aslan Nazaraliyev told The Astana Times. “There was not that strong of a chaotic panic. There was panic, screaming – all were shocked, of course. But, thank God, there was no fire. We could get out, and we helped each other.” The relatives of survivor Gulim Akisheva, who is five months pregnant, publicly thanked fellow passenger Temirlan Kadauov. Kadauov covered Akisheva with his own body and helped her get out of the plane. “The country must know its heroes,” Akisheva’s relative Dana Tolbekova told NeKhabar’s Telegram channel about Kazakh news. “Temirlan is an example of a real man who, despite his injury, remained brave and courageous. We, Gulim’s relatives, want to express our deep gratitude to Temirlan and his parents for raising a son so worthily.” Emergency services arrived 20 minutes after the crash and helped

evacuate all involved. Local village residents provided the victims with food and hot tea. Dozens of Almaty residents rushed to donate blood and overwhelmed the City Transfusion Centre. “Friends! Many thanks to all Atintsy [a nickname for Almaty residents] who responded to the call! A large crowd gathered in the city Transfusion Centre, at the intersection of Chapayev and Bukharzhyrau, please approach the issue with understanding and patience. There are enough blood components in the National Centre, you don’t need to go there. You can donate blood tomorrow, the day after tomorrow,” blogger Konstantin Avershin wrote in an Instagram post. Employees of the Almaty Department of Emergency Situations and Karasai district police officers also donated blood for the victims. The Emergency Service Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs organised a phone hotline to provide emergency psychological assistance to victims in Nur-Sultan, Almaty city and the Almaty and Kostanai regions. The hotline number received 917 calls and provided emergency psychological assistance to 30 relatives of the victims. The hotline received calls from the embassies and representative offices of the Netherlands, the United States, the Philippines, Finland, Russia, Slovakia and Germany. Relatives of the victims also received emergency psychological help from 23 psychologists at Nur-Sultan airport. The rescue operation involved 984 people and 72 units in total. Air Astana launched an additional flight from Almaty to Nur-Sultan Dec. 28 at 7.15 a.m., said Madiyar Uakpayev, spokesman for the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development. The Ministry of Internal Affairs created a national operational headquarters at the Situational Centre of the Committee for Emergency Situations. The operational headquarters handled emergencies and coordinated the activities of interacting emergency and relevant civil protection services. Operational headquarters were created in Nur-Sultan, Almaty city, the Almaty and Kostanai regions and two headquarters were set up at the international airports of Nur-Sultan and Almaty.

UNDP, Bitfury to create Pavlodar forestland...

Continued from Page A1

Kazakhstan currently legally owns 29 million hectares of forest. Most of the land, however, is threatened by illegal logging, forest fires and land-use change. While these 29 million hectares of land is somehow protected, there are forest lands that “are not included in the state forest fund,” BIOFIN Financial Mechanism Expert Meruyert Sarsembayeva told The Astana Times. “We will work with the forests that are not being considered and managed. It is exactly these forests that are threatened by the forest fires and illnesses. If they are not legitimised and transferred to the state forest fund, it may lead to that, they will produce even more emission,” she said. The initiative envisions creating forestland in the region to compensate for Bitfury’s carbon footprint. The company will start with 20 hectares. Bitfury will consume coal-fired electricity and the carbon footprint produced by electricity suppliers “will be compensated by 100-110

percent,” she said. The forests will consume the carbon dioxide supply generated by the Kazakh companies supplying the electricity. The project will start by creating cartographic materials of unaccounted (ownerless) forests and purchasing firefighting equipment. The parties will determine the span of its emission compensation “after the exact area and composition (species, age) of unaccounted forests is determined by the methodology that is currently under consideration by the Ministry of Ecology,” she said. The involvement of the Kazakh government and local authorities is a must as “its implementation requires a change in the legal status in forest areas,” she added. “We fully support the UNDP sustainable development goals aimed at protecting our planet and are inspired by Kazakhstan’s initiative to create mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” said Bitfury CEO and co-founder Valery Vavilov, according to the press service. UNDP will act as “a focal point, providing experience and assistance

to the above parties in a collaborative effort,” Sarsembayeva added. The project is part of the Biodiversity Financing Initiative (BIOFIN), which will also assist in improving forest management practices through Kazakh legislation and by raising public awareness on the ways to reduce emissions. BIOFIN helps countries around the world measure their biodiversity spending, assess the funding needed to achieve their goals and make recommendations on how to raise money from various sources. “Further expansion of the project’s experience provides an opportunity for wider participation of local and international organisations with a large carbon footprint in projects of a similar nature and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions,” she said. Kazakhstan has set the goal to receive 50 percent of its energy from alternative and renewable sources by 2050. With UN support, the country has reduced the annual energy consumption to heat pilot residential buildings by 25-45 percent in the past five years.

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Eight rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities and 16 additional inclusion support rooms will be opened as part of the agreement between the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan and Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund. The Samruk Kazyna group of companies has allocated more than \$159 million for charity in the past five years to support more than one million individuals. The first stage involves supporting children with special needs and approximately 171 specialists and 49 rehabilitation therapists will participate in trainings. The fund will provide equipment for the centres. “Our working group visited all regions and identified the towns where rehabilitation centres and inclusion rooms will be located. They will be located in hospitals, clinics and secondary schools in eight regions. Kazakhstan’s First President Nursultan Nazarbayev set the task to open the centres this year. The Samruk Kazyna Fund will help us to create better conditions for children,” said Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan Executive Director Asset Issekeshiev.

Government for Citizens contact centre 1411 has switched to round-the-clock mode, reported the Government for Citizens press service. Information is available regarding registering pensions and benefits, social allowance for large families, targeted social assistance and social services websites, labour relations and employment and applications for online psychological consultation for those raising children with disabilities. Approximately 5,000 people per day reach the centre on social issues. “Since the beginning of the year, our centre has received more than 22,000 calls. Most of the people are interested in pension and social security, assignment of monthly allowance to large families and issues of appointing social assistance,” said Government for Citizens Deputy Board Chairperson Birzhan Zhunussov.

A 10-megawatt solar power plant was launched in late December in Kengir village near Zhezkazgan in the Karaganda Region, reported Kazinform. A total of 29,436 solar panels were installed on a 20-hectare area to generate 14 million kilowatt/hour per year. The electricity will be distributed by the Zhezkazgan Distribution Electric Grid networks. The first three power plants were built earlier in the city of Saran and Agadir and Gulshat villages. More than 60 billion tenge (US\$159 million) was invested to construct all the solar stations in the region. “2019 was a breakthrough year for the region in terms of renewables. By developing solar energy, we not only prevent capacity shortages, but also solve environmental issues. Our region is becoming a leader in renewable energy sources,” said Karaganda Region Akim (Governor) Zhenis Kassymbek.

Beginning in March, the government will provide housing for approximately 2,000 families in Nur-Sultan this year as part of the second stage of the Bakytty Otbasy (Happy Family) programme. Participants will receive one million tenge (US\$2,700) housing certificates. To date, 721 families have received housing in the capital. Large and single parent families, as well as citizens raising children with special needs, may apply for the programme, which provides 2-percent loans. Twenty-year, 10-million tenge (US\$26,700) loans have 50,000 tenge (US\$132) monthly payments. Overpayment will be approximately two million tenge (US\$5,300). This year, 100 billion tenge (US\$266 million) will be allocated to implement the programme nationwide. Local authorities also provide assistance in housing for socially vulnerable categories of people.

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh government reviewed Dec. 30 the results and implementation of the legislation plan for 2019, including tightening several crime punishments and determined the plan for 2020. The legislation plan for 2019 initially envisaged 27 bills, but taking into account the developer bodies’ proposals and the amendments introduced during the year, the plan provided for the development of 32 bills. The Parliament received all of them. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed three bills; the Parliament will review the rest. One of the important bills is the bill on Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Improvement of Criminal, Criminal Procedure Laws and Enhancing the Protection of Personal Rights. The President signed the bill into law on Dec. 30. The new law tightens punishments for crimes, such as theft, robbery, online drug distribution, poaching and violence against wildlife inspectors. Sentences and ad-

ministrative supervision terms were also lengthened for sexual harassment and rape, especially against minors, became serious crimes. The legislation plan underwent 10 adjustments during 2019. These amendments included the addition of four bills, postponement of the deadlines for 12 bills and the division of one bill into two parts. According to Minister of Justice Marat Beketayev, the main reasons for the missed deadline were poor-quality analysis of law enforcement practice at the bill’s concept development stage as well as the lack of necessary control by the developing state bodies’ first heads. The government also held several meetings on legislative issues and as a result, the Ministry of Justice has developed amendments to some decisions aimed at strengthening control over legislative activity and improving the quality of legislative work. These amendments provide for an increase in the developing state body’s responsibility for the postponement or violation of the deadlines of the planned bill. The corresponding draft resolution is under consideration by the Office of the Prime Minister.

In addition, to improve law developing and public discussion procedures the Ministry of Justice has developed a package of legislative amendments on improving the legislative process. The government approved the relevant bill at a meeting and it will be submitted to the Parliament in the near future. The government also discussed the legislation plan for 2020. “The draft Plan for 2020 contains 17 bills aimed at resolving urgent and important issues, fulfilling the instructions of First President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Head of State Kassym-Jomart Tokayev,” said Prime Minister Askar Mamin. The bills to be developed are aimed at the development of areas such as social security, physical education and sports, military service and housing of special state bodies’ employees and military personnel. It is also planned to develop new draft laws On the Control of Specific Goods, On the Plant World and On Veterans. Out of 17 bills provided by the draft plan, the government plans to introduce eight draft laws to the Parliament in the first half of 2020 and nine in the second half of the year.

Aviation Administration to modernise standards

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Aviation Administration of Kazakhstan (AAK), which began engaging in technical control and supervision Aug. 1, will modernise the country’s aviation regulations within two years. Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Kazakhstan Director General Peter Griffiths spoke with The Astana Times about the details of its work. “The purpose of the AAK is to take out all of the regulatory activity which is done by the government and to oversee all of the airlines, making sure that they are operating to high international standards, to bring all the airports and other mechanisms we need up in order for international airlines to come in,” he said. The 100 Concrete Steps Plan of the Nation proposed by First President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2015 lists Step 68 as switching to the British model of aviation industry state regulation. The change will allow meeting International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) requirements for qualified inspectors and achieving its 80-percent safety goal. The U.K. Civil Aviation Authority International (CAAi) and AAK concluded an agreement Oct. 7 in London to provide technical assis-



tance in transitioning to the British civil aviation regulatory model. In the past year and a half, the Civil Aviation Committee (CAC) has developed and introduced appropriate amendments to the main civil aviation law. “We are trying to change the regulation system here in Kazakhstan to be able to make it more dynamic towards the industry, but also to modernise it. Many countries have been doing this, when they have been putting up a number of separate agencies. The United Kingdom is probably the leader in doing that. So, Kazakhstan decided to do the same,” said Griffiths. It is easy to say, but it is not easy to do, he noted. Because Kazakhstan does not have an equivalent organisation for AAK to use as a model, it is trying to create one. The agency is trying to incorporate all the work practices in use in the United Kingdom and Europe and, at the same time, modernise the

technology and ways of working. “It takes about six months for us to set up a regulator. In my career, I have managed to do this twice. It takes quite a long time to get a regulator going. The last one I did was for the European Commission; I was chair of the performance review body overseeing the 31 countries. There was a regulator we set up and that took us nearly six years to get going. So, this one we need to do in two years, because the President wants Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Category 1 status, which gives them the ability to fly from Nur-Sultan to New York. To do that we have to improve all the regulations, but he has set the time on that, which is 2021. It is quite a difficult challenge for us to do, but we are working on it,” he added. In the future, AAK plans to apply for International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) FAA Category 1, meaning the country’s civil aviation authority complies with ICAO standards and its certified air carriers can provide services in the United States, as well as use the American partners’ code. Since the administration needs to complete the process quickly, it considers getting the right people its primary asset. “You have to get people who are willing to work above and beyond what we ask them to do. They also

have to be quite innovative. I come from a low-cost industry; I was part of the low-cost transformation in Europe, I was part of EasyJet. We were asked to achieve the same objective, but quicker and cheaper. Transforming systems, building new systems, building new ways of working is something that I have been doing for about 30 years now. Second is to make sure that you train the people properly, that they have access to all the material that they need, so they can do self-analysis,” said Griffiths. “We are trying to change the regulation system here in Kazakhstan to be able to make it more dynamic towards the industry, but also to modernise it.” He noted working with Kazakh airlines has been a very positive experience. He appreciated the work of Air Astana, which operates on European standards, making it not that difficult to manage. The other airlines, such as SCAT and Qazaq Air are at different levels but are all working towards the same common objective.

“As we go through an education process of our regulating community on what it is that we need from them, we can tailor it to their (the airlines’) requirements. We are getting quite positive responses from them. We have very good engagement from the airports. The first problematic one was Kostanai. We were working with them and trying to be as flexible as possible, trying to give them operating capabilities as quickly as we can, but still make sure to maintain the standards,” he said. He also addressed the situation with Air Astana purchasing Boeing 737s. “Air Astana did not purchase anything; they said they will if the planes are certified. Boeing staked their reputation on this aircraft; they only have one chance. If one of these aircraft crashes, that will be the end of Boeing. I do not think that they will make this mistake again,” said Griffiths. Kazakhstan has 893 aircraft on its register, many of which are of Soviet heritage, he added. More than 755 flights a day and 15,000 a month are conducted in Kazakh airspace, not counting military flights. Aviation is quite advanced, but still there are some accidents, including the most recent one of Bek Air near Almaty on Dec. 27, and AAK’s task is to bring them down to zero.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan ranked 69th in 2019 Social Progress Index among 149 countries, improving its position from 71st place in 2018. Kazakhstan performed within the expected range in access to Nutrition and Basic Medical Care, Basic Knowledge, Advanced Education, as well as Information and Communications. The country slightly underperformed in Personal Freedom and Choice. According to the report, the country needs more work in areas such as Inclusiveness, Environment Quality, Health and Wellness, among others. The world's average score has improved 2.31 points since 2014. Norway, scoring 90.95, leads the rating.

Kazakhstan and the United States signed Jan. 6 an agreement on air traffic under the open skies regime, reported the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development press service. The agreement will establish the legal framework for direct regular flights between the two countries. This is Kazakhstan's first open sky agreement. It provides opportunities for carriers planning to fly between the countries, in which the parties can fly without restrictions on the number of carriers, destinations and frequencies, including those with the fifth degree of airspace freedom. The opening of direct flights is expected to contribute to the development of political, economic, cultural relations and tourism, as well as transport accessibility of the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC).

Kazakhstan and South Korea will build a plant to produce high-voltage electrical equipment in Nur-Sultan, *liter.kz* reports. The products are to be sold on the local market and exported to other countries. Nur-Sultan Akim (Mayor) Altay Kulginov discussed Jan. 14 the establishment of the joint venture between Kazakh Alageum Electric company and South Korean Hyosung Heavy Industries during his trip to Seoul. The project will help solve the problem of fast-growing cities in providing safe and stable electricity in tight spaces. The first products will be released in 2021.

Kazakhstan tightened control at all checkpoints with China due to their pneumonia outbreak, Committee for Quality Control and Safety of Goods and Services Chair Lyudmila Byurabekova announced during the Jan.13 press briefing. The first case of the disease was registered Dec. 8, the last on Jan. 3. The incidence is more associated with people who worked in a seafood market in Wuhan or were regular visitors there, she said. The Chinese authorities announced the pneumonia outbreak of unknown origin in Wuhan in late December. As of Jan. 5, 59 cases of infection were registered. Chinese experts' preliminarily established Jan. 9 that a new type of coronavirus became the causative agent of the disease.

Kazakhstan and China agreed on 30 percent of the text of the draft agreement on water allocation on transboundary rivers, reported *in-business.kz*. The Kazakhstan version of the document provides for standards that take into account the needs of the ecosystems of Balkhash, Ile, Zaysan and Irtysh rivers. The parties created a joint commission on the use and protection of transboundary rivers, as well as a working group of experts. The water relations between the countries have been regulated by an agreement on cooperation in the use and protection of transboundary rivers of 2001.

Kazakh singer Dimash Kudaibergen will perform his first stadium concert in Russia March 9 at the Megasport Sport Palace. The 26-year-old artist will present a large-scale solo programme for the first time. At the upcoming performance, Dimash (as he is known by his fans) will perform his best compositions in Kazakh, Russian, Spanish, English, French and other languages. Concert details and names of special guests will be announced soon. The Russian public discovered Dimash after his victory at the Slavic Bazaar in 2015.

Kazakhstan to spend \$23 million on EXPO 2020 pavilion in Dubai



By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan has allocated 8.8 billion tenge (US\$23 million) for its pavilion at EXPO 2020 in Dubai, reported *zakon.kz*.

“First of all, the government has set the goal of increasing the investment volume in fixed assets, including foreign direct investments, from \$24 billion this year to \$34 billion by 2025. That is, we plan to annually increase the inflow of foreign investment in Ka-

zakhstan by an additional \$10 billion. For this, it is very important to participate in the World Exhibition in Dubai,” said First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Alikhan Smailov.

International investors will visit the expo, and it is important for

Kazakhstan to show its attractive nature.

“The Kazakh national pavilion will be within the thematic cluster Opportunities; many different investors from around the world will visit it. Approximately 8.8 billion tenge was allocated for construc-

tion of the national pavilion and ensuring its functioning. If as a result of visiting our pavilion additional foreign investments come to Kazakhstan, the allocated money will be gained back many times by creating new industries, creating new jobs and additional taxes that will go to the budget. Therefore, it is very important to participate there,” he added.

Minister of Trade and Integration Bakhyt Sultanov noted money from the budget has been allocated in previous years. The funds were used to prepare the pavilion, but will also be used to dismantle it following the event and bring it to Kazakhstan. The structure will be rebuilt to represent the nation's products either in the region or the capital.

Kazakhstan intends to build one of the expo's most ambitious pavilions. At 3,420 square metres, it will be one of the largest on the site. The pavilion will be located near those of Belarus, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.

EXPO 2020, with the theme Connecting Minds, Creating the Future, will be open Oct. 20-April 10, 2021. Organisers expect approximately 25 million visitors. The exhibition complex is in the form of a shamrock, with the 150-metre diameter Al-Wasl Plaza at the centre and adjacent to the United Arab Emirates pavilion. The design offers three thematic clusters – Mobility, Opportunities and Sustainability.

Flag installation tradition for new non-permanent UNSC members lives on

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the United Nations took part Jan. 2 in the official flag installation ceremony of the newly elected non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at the United Nations headquarters, reported the mission.

Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam are the newest non-permanent members of the body, and will serve from 2020 through 2021.

It was Kazakhstan that es-

tablished the ceremony during its January 2018 UNSC presidency.

“The objective of this ceremony,



Photo credit: Mfa.kz.

initiated by Kazakhstan, which is held for the third time, is to recognise the mandate given to you by the international community to

fulfil the important and responsible task of maintaining global peace and security. The election of your countries to the Security Council testifies to trusting by the remaining 192 member states in your governments in the commitment to the ideas outlined in the UN Charter, especially in these challenging times,” Kazakh Permanent Representative to the UN Kairat Umarov told the attendees.

Ambassadors of the new non-permanent UNSC members spoke about their priorities for their time on the council and expressed gratitude to Kazakhstan for organising the event.

Previously, the flag installation ceremony of UNSC non-perma-

nent members took place at the press wall in front of the Security Council Hall.

Now, the ceremony is an official event in the annual programme of the first day of the UN Security Council with wide participation of representatives of UN member countries and world media.

In January 2019, the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan presented to the UN handmade flag stands as a gift for UN Security Council members. The stands are made in Kazakhstan and decorated in the national style.

Kazakhstan completed its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC December 31, 2018.

Nation to lead Landlocked Developing Countries group

By Elya Altynsarina

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan has assumed chairmanship of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC) for 2020-2021. The chairmanship transfer ceremony was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York with participation from UN member ambassadors and experts and the UN High Representative for Least Developed Countries, LLDCs and Small Island Developing States Fekitameloela Utoikamanu.

The group includes 32 nations – 16 in Africa; ten in Asia, including all five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan; four in Europe and two in South America. Kazakhstan, the largest landlocked country, is located at the farthest distance from the oceans (about 3,750 km).

During its chairmanship, Kazakhstan intends to contribute to implementing the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs (2014–2024) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals through the group's enhanced and coor-

minated cooperation with transit countries, UN agencies and other interested parties on a regional basis.

“As chair, Kazakhstan will make every effort to enhance cooperation between our group and all interested parties, including UN agencies, international financial institutions, the private sector and academia,” said Kairat Umarov, the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the event. He also thanked Paraguay Permanent Representative to the UN Julio Cesar Arriola, who chaired the group

for last two years, for his significant contribution in this role.

“Utoikamanu emphasised Kazakhstan has always taken an active position in promoting and protecting the group's interests. She noted with its government's support, the LLDC ministerial meeting on trade issues is being planned in June in the capital. The meeting is part of the World Trade Organisation's 12th ministerial conference. Kazakhstan was elected chair during the LLDC annual ministerial meeting in New York on Sept. 25.

Lack of access to the sea, remoteness and isolation from global markets and high transit costs impede the general socio-economic development of landlocked countries. Sea trade is fully dependent on transit through third countries and additional border crossings and long distances significantly increase costs. LLDCs also face challenges including poor infrastructure development, small economic markets, vulnerability to climate change and insufficient access to information and communication technologies.

Kazakhstan ratifies agreement with GRECO, becoming its 50th member

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev ratified his country's agreement with the Council of Europe on immunities and privileges for Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) representatives Jan. 4, according to the *akorda.kz*.

The agreement was signed Oct. 15 in Strasbourg, France, by Kazakh Anti-Corruption Agency Chair Alik Shpekbayev and by Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General Gabriella Battaini Dragoni. GRECO's headquarters are in Strasbourg.

“The purpose of this agreement is to provide the representatives of GRECO and assessment groups with immunities from civil, administrative and criminal liability, from detentions and arrests, including their baggage, personal belongings and equipment, during visits to Kazakhstan related to the fulfilment of their official duties,” noted First Deputy Chair of the Kazakh Anti-Corruption Agency Olzhas Bektenov during the ratification process in the parliament.

The agreement is intended to prevent GRECO representatives from being blocked in any way from doing their work in sharing best practices and strengthening

the Kazakh capabilities in fighting corruption.

The documents of GRECO representatives and assessment group members, who may include scientific experts, Council of Europe officials and translators assisting them, regarding audits in Kazakhstan are to be inviolable, and official GRECO correspondence and its official means of communication will be prohibited from arrest or censorship.

“The agreement provides GRECO representatives and members of assessment groups the opportunity to use privileges and immunities, to perform independently functions related to the work of

GRECO, and not for the personal benefit of individuals. Kazakhstan's close cooperation with the Council of Europe will raise the development of democracy and the protection of human rights in Kazakhstan to a new level, so the conclusion of the agreement was a timely, necessary and justified measure,” added Bektenov.

It is expected that ratifying this agreement will help Kazakhstan's anti-corruption efforts and improve its ranking in global corruption indices.

All GRECO member states are granted uniform, model immunities and privileges and follow 20 anti-corruption guidelines. Ka-

zakhstan has now become the 50th GRECO member state. “I welcome the Republic of Kazakhstan as GRECO anticorruption body 50th member state,” wrote GRECO Executive Secretary Gianluca Esposito on Twitter.

Kazakhstan is GRECO's first member in Asia – the rest of its 49 members comprise European countries and the United States.

According to the Council of Europe, GRECO was established in 1999 to improve its members' capacity to fight corruption by monitoring their compliance with Council of Europe anti-corruption standards through a dynamic process of mutual evaluation and peer pressure. GRECO helps identify deficiencies in national anti-corruption policies, prompting the necessary legislative, institutional and practical reforms. The organisation also provides a platform for sharing best practices in preventing and detecting corruption.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

Exports fell 4.5 percent in 2019

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan’s export volume decreased 4.5 percent during first 10 months of 2019 and exports fell from 65.1 percent of all trade volume to 60.4 percent, energyprom.kz reported Dec. 30, using data from the Kazakh Ministry of National Economy’s Statistics Committee.

Exports decreased from \$50 billion in 2018 to \$47.7 billion in 2019.

At the same time, trade turnover increased 3 percent compared with the same period in 2018, amounting to \$79.1 billion. Import increased 17 percent in 2019, from \$26.8 billion to 31.4 million. The share of import in total trade increased from 34.9 percent to 39.6 percent in 2019.

Mineral products made up the largest share of exports in 2019 at 73 percent of total exports, or \$34.8 billion. Of this, \$32 billion



came from fuel and energy products. Metals and metal products amounted to \$6.5 billion or 13.7 percent of the total exports; animal

and vegetable products and finished food products made up \$2.6 billion, or 5.4 percent. Major export product groups

also included chemical products and related industries (\$2.2 billion) and machinery, equipment, vehicles, appliances and appa-

ratus (\$930.1 million). Seventy-four percent, or \$45.4 billion, of Kazakhstan’s total exports were commodities. Accordingly, 25.8 percent, or \$15.8 billion, were non-oil exports. According to the National Export Strategy, Kazakhstan set an export target for non-primary goods and services in 2018 of \$22.7 billion, and for 2019, \$24.7 billion.

Measures to boost Kazakhstan’s exports include changes to legislation governing the redistribution of repayable funds for the provision of soft loans and financing for non-primary sector export-oriented projects. Authorised capital has been increased and a state guarantee mechanism has been introduced for Kazakh Export. Measures to reimburse transport costs for industrial and innovative enterprises were also introduced. The goal of the changes is to increase the volume of non-oil exports by one and a half times by 2022, and to double it by 2025.

ECONOMIC NEWS IN BRIEF

The Kazakh banks which received 654 billion tenge (US\$1.72 billion) from the state will be able to return the money ahead of schedule, reported finprom.kz. The banking sector is stable and characterised by a decrease in the level of non-performing loans and excess liquidity, as well as moderate lending. Positive recovery dynamics began in 2017 and since that time, the banks’ equity has increased more than 30 percent. In addition, a decrease in problem loans has led to a four-fold increase in bank capital to cover them. The banks have more than 10 trillion tenge (US\$26.41 billion) of free liquidity, or 40 percent of assets.

Kazakhstan’s air traffic reached a record high number of passengers from January-November 2019. The country’s airlines transported 7.9 million people, a 7.5-percent increase year-on-year (yoy), and their revenues increased 16 percent per year. According to the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development, Kazakh airports provided services for 14.8 million passengers in the first ten months of 2019 and expected the indicator to reach 16 million. The ministry has forecast air traffic will increase 6.6 percent in 2020. Kazakhstan introduced an open sky regime in November at 11 domestic airports; as a result, airlines such as LOT Polish Airlines (Poland), Air Asia (Malaysia), Belavia (Belarus), Jazeera Airways (Kuwait) and Salam Air (Oman) should soon open new flights.

Kazakhstan’s electricity consumption increased 2 percent in 2019, reported energyprom.kz. Electricity generation during the same period decreased 0.4 percent. In January-November, the country’s electricity production was 96.7 billion kilowatt hours (kWh), a 0.4 percent decrease per year. In monetary terms, electricity production, transmission and distribution for the period decreased to 1.4 trillion tenge (US\$3.7 billion). In 2018, electricity production reached 107.3 billion kWh, a 4-percent increase year-on-year (yoy). According to the Ministry of Energy, Kazakhstan’s 138 electric power plants produce 21,673 megawatts. The majority of stations (69.7 percent) generate energy from coal, 20 percent from gas, 9 percent from hydroelectric power plants (excluding small plants) and 1.3 percent from renewable sources (including small hydroelectric power stations).

Approximately 2,300 large and 6,000 medium-sized companies were operating in Kazakhstan at the end of November 2019. In the first three quarters of the year, large and medium-sized enterprises manufactured products and rendered services worth 9.2 trillion tenge (US\$24.3 billion), a 5.7-percent increase year-on-year (yoy), and represented 20.7 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP). The Atyrau Region, with 1.9 trillion tenge (US\$5.02 billion) or 20.7 percent of the total, had the largest production volume in the sector. Almaty and Nur-Sultan were also included in the top three regions, producing 1.7 trillion (US\$4.49 billion) and 1.5 trillion tenge (US\$3.96 billion), respectively. The trio comprise 55.9 percent of the country’s output. Large and medium-sized mining companies account for 2.4 trillion tenge (US\$6.34 billion) or a 26-percent share, the largest product and services volume in the sector. The figure, however, was a 7.6-percent decrease per year.

Operations have begun on www.finreg.kz, the official website of the financial market regulation and development agency. By a presidential decree, “On further improvement of the public administration system of Kazakhstan,” a new state body was launched in January. The agency ensures protecting the rights and legitimate interests of financial services consumers, contributes to the stability of the financial system, develops the financial market and carries out state regulation, control and supervision of the financial market and financial organisations. The agency is the assignee of the Kazakh National Bank’s rights and obligations in accordance with the transferred functions and powers.

Government approves new draft Ecology Code to toughen penalties for environmental offenses

Continued from Page A1

The public will be able to participate in all four stages of the EIA: a statement of intent, assessment scope, report and conclusion on the results.

Under the third principle, industrial enterprises will undergo a technological audit to be offered

create phased waste management, a sequence of measures to reuse, recycle, dispose of and prevent waste.

Enterprises will need to license their activities for waste processing and disposal to reduce the number of unauthorised landfills.

In addition, the draft code also proposes introducing Waste to



Magzum Mirzagaliyev

the best available technologies (BAT) to produce fewer emissions. The government will exempt fines from first category companies that transition to the BATs.

By the fourth principle, the code will oblige local executive bodies to entirely redirect the revenue from the fines to measures that should reduce emissions. The move is in response to international experts who have repeatedly criticised Kazakhstan’s environmental fines and spending.

Enterprises will need to license their activities for waste processing and disposal to reduce the number of unauthorised landfills.

The fifth principle aims to obtain timely and reliable information on the qualitative and quantitative composition of emissions and discharges. Large companies will be required to launch automated emission monitoring systems.

The sixth principle will strengthen environmental control. The draft proposes amendments to ensure prompt response to facts with negative environmental impact and will strengthen administrative fines for environmental offenses 10 times.

The final principle seeks to improve waste management production and consumption by introducing the circular economy principles used in OECD countries. It will

Energy, which will create revenue from electricity generated by waste incineration. At the same time, it sets strict quality emissions requirements similar to European directives.

Kazakhstan currently processes 14 percent of its solid waste. Due to low tariffs, however, investors find the industry unattractive.

“This mechanism will allow reducing waste volumes up to 30 percent by 2025 and attracting private investments,” said Mirzagaliyev.

If the mechanism works, it could attract more than 180 billion tenge (US\$470.21 million) in investments.

Mamin instructed the government to create a BAT Bureau within the International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects.

To date, Kazakhstan has accumulated more than 3.5 million tonnes of municipal solid waste at its 3,500 landfills. According to ministry’s data, pollutant emissions reached 2.5 million tonnes with 100,000 tonnes in annual growth in 2018.

Mirzagaliyev stressed the need for “appropriate measures” to reduce emissions; otherwise, “according to the forecast in 2030, the emission of pollutants will reach 3.6 million tonnes.”

The ministry, “with the support of the German side,” has begun creating a low-carbon development strategy through 2050, he added.

Kazakhstan began prohibiting burying plastic, waste paper, cardboard and glass this year. The programme did not work sufficiently, however, due to the regions’ lack of infrastructure.

Kazakhstan mandates online cash registers starting in 2020

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – All taxpayers who use traditional cash registers were to switch to online machines by the end of 2019, for beginning in 2020 all cash payments are to be made using online cash registers, said the Ministry of Finance State Revenue Committee’s Department of Digitisation and Public Services Acting Director Zangar Shyndali in an interview with PrimeMinister.kz.

He noted 97 percent of the 640,000 cashiers registered in the country now work online and 480,000 taxpayers started using them in 2019.

Introducing online cash registers is aimed at combatting tax evasion and the shadow economy. The method was implemented in response to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s instructions to strengthen measures against tax evasion in his state-of-the-nation address “Constructive Public Dialogue – the Basis of Stability and Prosperity of Kazakhstan.”

“According to research, most of the shadow economy falls on trade where cash prevails. It is



Zangar Shyndali

precisely cash registers that allow you to fiscalise this cash,” said Shyndali.

He noted three billion checks have been struck online.

“The more checks consumers will demand, the more information we will see and the more cash will be fiscalised,” he added.

Taxpayers operating in areas lacking a telecommunication network are among those exempt from using online cashiers. Individuals, second-tier banks, long-distance carriers and taxpayers who never use cash settlements are allowed to use a traditional electronic cash register (ECR) without the online system.

Taxpayers can transfer funds to an online cash register without visiting a tax office. Those registered as individual entrepreneurs

or legal entities can purchase a register at a public service centre or download the application to switch to the one online. Taxpayers should register it on the fiscal data operator’s website and complete the contract. The operator will accept and transfer information about fiscal settlements to the tax administration.

“He (a taxpayer) does not need to fill out a cash settlement book and there is no need to put a seal on an online cash register. He can do all this remotely and on the site of the fiscal data operator,” said Shyndali.

Online cash registers allow entrepreneurs with more than two cash desks to monitor all payments and operations remotely.

The government has been returning 50 percent of the cash register machine cost to taxpayers this year to encourage them to shift to online registers, he noted.

“Taxpayers who apply the special tax regime on the basis of a patent, as well as single land taxpayers, and anyone who wants to purchase cash registers with a 50-percent discount, we urge them to do it this year, because next year there will not be such an opportunity,” he added.

Cashless payments for initial house, car sales to be introduced

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, speaking during the second meeting of the National Council of Public Trust last December, instructed the government and National Bank to implement a cashless payment system for initial house and car sales.

“The government and the National Bank should prepare a package of legislative amendments to introduce cashless payments in the initial sale of housing and cars. Of course, there is a need to factor in the features of our territorial development, especially, in rural areas,” he said.

He noted the amendments will help tackle the shadow economy.

“Today, with development of banking technologies, a respectable citizen or business needs a small amount of cash. At the same time, the share of shadow economy in the real estate and auto markets is about three trillion tenge (US\$7.8 billion). There is a need to put things in order,” he added.

At the first meeting, council members discussed the need to provide business representatives with an effective tool to evaluate

and verify their potential counterparties.

Tokayev noted the government and Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs will create an open and integrated business entity database, where each entrepreneur will be able to verify his or her counterparty. The catalogue will display the companies’ tax arrears and administrative offenses.

He also discussed the need to

and it met for the first time Sept. 6. “Our citizens are deeply concerned about the development of dialogue between the government and the society. This dialogue should be based on the recognition of pluralism of opinions. Different views, but one united nation – this is the main guideline,” he said.

The national council includes representatives of almost all the country’s social and political

“The government and the National Bank should prepare a package of legislative amendments to introduce cashless payments in the initial sale of housing and cars.”

strengthen control over rational land use and instructed the government to increase basic tax rates on unused land from 10 to 20 times. He requested the audit be completed before May 1.

The main goal of the National Council of Public Trust is to hold discussions with representatives of political parties and civil society, where they can offer proposals and recommendations on public policy issues. Tokayev announced its creation at his June 12 inauguration ceremony

groups, said Advisor to the President Erlan Karin.

“The composition of the council is very balanced... Here, (there are) representatives of the ‘old’ opposition, representatives of the new protest movement, civil society activists, prominent human rights activists who have been involved in the protection of human rights for many years, youth activists and leaders, representatives of the regions and leading Kazakh experts,” he noted.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

BUSINESS
NEWS IN BRIEF

Fifty high school students from Arys, which suffered explosions this summer, had the opportunity to master business basics during the winter break, reported inbusiness.kz Jan. 7. As part of the final stage of Menin Arys (My Arys), a special project initiated after the incident, the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs opened 1317 Kz entrepreneurial camp; the numbers indicate the minimum and maximum ages of the participants. The course combines the Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship from the school programme, Atameken Business Academy and Bastau business courses. Upon completion, each camper received a Zhas (Young) Master of Business Administration (MBA) certificate and individual development card.

Damu Entrepreneurship Development Fund summed up the results Dec. 31 of the Business Roadmap 2020 programme, reported inforburo.kz. The programme's purpose was ensuring regional entrepreneurship's sustainable and balanced growth, as well as maintaining existing jobs and creating new ones. During the ten years, the small and medium-sized business share of the gross domestic product (GDP) increased to 28.4 percent compared to 24.9 percent in 2015. The number of operating small and medium-sized businesses increased by 400,000 and the number of employees by 300,000. More than 16,000 business entities received financing, more than 100,000 entrepreneurs received training, products worth 15.5 trillion tenge (US\$40.9 billion) were produced and one trillion tenge (US\$2.7 billion) was paid in taxes. The Business Roadmap was extended through 2025. While the draft has the identical goals and objectives, support tools have been improved. Lending has been increased from 60 to 360 million tenge (US\$158,700 to \$952,200) and the government has allocated 421 billion tenge (US\$1.1 billion) for the next phase, 1.5 times more than the funding for the previous five years.

Kazakhtelecom, which tested 5G technology Dec. 18, spoke about the capabilities of fifth-generation networks at the Digital Samruk 2019 forum in Nur-Sultan, reported profit.kz. It announced the intermediate results of digitising and implementing innovative projects in the country's largest companies, and participants had the opportunity to become acquainted with the partner experience in digital technologies, world trends and cases. One of the forum's important events was demonstrating 5G technology using the Tele2 and Kcell networks, where devices achieved speeds of up to 1.5 Gbit/s at a specially organised demo booth. Kazakhtelecom launched its 5G commercial network Oct. 24 on the Altel network at Astana Hub, an international technology park of IT start-ups, becoming one of only several operators in the world to provide such service.

Kaspi.kz earned 363 billion tenge (US\$960 million) during the first nine months of 2019, reported profit.kz Dec. 23. Revenues increased 34 percent compared to the same period of 2018 and the net profit margin increased from 30.8 percent to 37.1 percent. The number of active mobile app users increased by three million to 5.4 million, or approximately one in three Kazakh citizens.

Due to losses, Pavlodar International Airport is seeking an investor, reported inbusiness.kz Jan. 6. Two scheduled domestic flights to Almaty and Nur-Sultan, as well as international flights to Minsk, Moscow, Novosibirsk and Turkey, pass through the airport. Of these, only the latter operates on a regular basis. A Turkish company has expressed interest and the necessary package of documents has been forwarded, according to airport Deputy Chair Dinara Musalimova. In her opinion, there is a need to rely on cargo transportation rather than new air routes, although work is continuing in this direction. Cargo routes would require at least three kilometres of runway and the airport currently has 2.5 kilometres.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Turkestan, Kazakhstan's youngest region, launched 49 projects worth \$195 million last year, including seven foreign investment projects worth \$96 million, reported the Turkistan Invest press service. The ventures created approximately 2,000 jobs.

The major investors include Nepal's CG Foods Central Asia, which opened a \$15-million noodle plant in the Kazygurt District, and China's Risen Energy, which started construction of a \$60-million solar power plant in the Sozak District in July. The power plant, with a 50-megawatt capacity producing 114 million kilowatts of electricity annually, will be the largest in the region. The company plans to install more than 151,000 solar panels and create approximately 400 jobs.

Sixteen foreign companies are expected to invest more than \$10 billion tenge (US\$2 billion) in the region in the near future.

In total, 75 companies, including



55 foreign firms, visited the region for a potential \$2.3-billion investment and possible 15,000 jobs. Eighteen projects worth \$2.1 billion were ultimately approved.

The list of projects includes a 500-hectare industrial greenhouse,

solar power plants, reinforced concrete plant, hotel and shopping mall and launching low-voltage cable production and shoe lines.

Turkistan Invest is working to streamline the process to implement investment projects.

"The office works on the single window principle from attracting an investor to the launch of the project. We establish contacts with local and foreign entrepreneurs who are interested in our region and support them. This approach

gives good results," said company front office head Medeu Dildabayev Dec. 30.

The office also operates an export development centre, which analyses export promotion. It has identified 224 exporting companies in the region.

"We spoke with all exporters and knew the information on the areas of their activities. According to the analysis, 98 companies are engaged in seasonal exports, 52 companies temporarily suspended their exports due to financial difficulties and 25 companies decided to stop exporting. We developed a roadmap to work with each entrepreneur," he added.

The office is coordinating with 47 large exporters on their production base and potential for further development and has developed a single call centre and guide on government support measures. An electronic trading platform for regional producers and exporters is integrated with Turkistaninvest.com to provide detailed information about exporting companies.

EuroChem invests in new fertiliser plant in Zhambyl region

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan's Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development, the Zhambyl region akimat (administration) and the EuroChem Mineral and Chemical company recently signed an investment agreement to build and operate a new \$1 billion fertiliser plant. Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin attended the signing ceremony in Zhanatas city of the Sarysu District.

EuroChem will produce one million tonnes of fertilisers per year. EuroChem's technology allows phosphate and complex fertilisers to be created without generating phosphogypsum waste and generally minimise harmful environmental impacts.

The project will also produce 120,000 tonnes of calcium chloride

and at least 400,000 tonnes of gypsum dehydrate per year. These can be used in the road, oil and gas, construction and agriculture industries.

The plant is expected to create 2,000 new jobs and to begin operations in 2021.

The prime minister also visited a wind farm currently under construction in Zhanatas. The wind power plant cost 50 billion tenge (US\$131.5 million) to build. It will generate 100 megawatts of clean electricity in its initial stage, with production increasing up to 200 MW. Some 19 wind turbines have been installed so far, and 40 are expected to be installed by the first quarter of 2020.

The Qazaqsoda company will build a soda ash plant, to be finished in 2022, at a cost of approximately 127 billion tenge (US\$446.9 million). Production is planned to be 400 tonnes per year

in its initial stage and to grow to one million tonnes per year.

Mamin participated in the presentation of the third production line of the Saule confectionery factory. The enterprise will generate 70 new employment opportunities.

Mamin also visited the Regional History and Local Lore Museum and the Art Gallery at the Kune Taraz Historical and Ethnocultural Complex, which opened Dec. 25 to commemorate the 8th anniversary of the Zhambyl region. Overall, production output for the first 11 months of 2019 in the Zhambyl region cost 319.5 billion tenge (US\$840.4 million) and investments in fixed assets were 250.1 billion tenge (US\$657.9 million). From 2020 to 2025, 66 investment projects with a total budget of 2.7 trillion tenge (US\$7.1 million) will be realised and are expected to create more than 11,000 jobs.



Photo credit: primeminister.kz

Italian investors launch renewable energy project in Aktobe Region

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – Italian investor Eni launched Kazakhstan's largest wind power production project Dec. 18 in the Aktobe Region. The \$100-million effort is also supported by Kazakh Invest and General Electric.

Italian Ambassador in Kazakhstan Pasquale D'Avino, Regional Akim (Governor) Ondassyn Urazalin, Eni Executive Vice President for the Central Asia region Luca Vignathi and Kazakh Invest Deputy Chair Birzhan Kaneshev participated in the opening ceremony.

"Our goal is to create comfortable conditions for doing business in the region, which will obviously allow attracting new investors into priority sectors of the economy. I believe Eni company's \$100 million investment in the region's growth is the result of great support given to the promising project by the authorities. We are eager to provide comprehensive assistance

to the investor in the construction of the second phase of the wind farm in 2020," said Urazalin.

He added local officials are taking all necessary measures in step with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's instructions to attract foreign investments and transition to a green economy. The pilot renewable energy project, with a capacity of 48 megawatts, is an important step towards the region's continued development.

The wind farm is expected to produce approximately 200 gigawatt hours (GWh) annually. According to experts, it will reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere by more than 172,000 tonnes per year.

"Kazakh Invest has provided all the needed assistance to the foreign investors in passing the approval procedures. Our task is not only attracting new investors, but stimulating the existing ones to reinvest in the new industrial branches," said Kaneshev.

According to company representatives, 480 employees and 14

Kazakh construction companies were involved in the work. Fifteen additional jobs will be generated.

Within the next few years, Eni intends to implement additional renewable energy projects in the country. In September, the company won the tender for an additional

48 megawatts to expand the wind farm. Two months later, it took the 50-megawatt auction for the solar power station project in the Turkestan Region.

"Eni company is taking its first steps in Kazakhstan. This is the first renewable energy project in the Aktobe region, as well as the

world's first wind farm launched by our company. We are fully committed to the idea of developing renewable energies and intend to spend \$1.5 billion on implementing these sources throughout the world during 2019-2022 under our four-year plan," said Vignathi.



Photo credit: old.tdinfo

EDITORIAL&OPINION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

With reforms on the way, coming decade looks positive for Kazakhstan

The increase in tensions in the Middle East is not just worrying for the region but the whole world. The fervent hope must be that dialogue can bring about a de-escalation of the crisis.

It is not just, of course, events in the Middle East which have shown the vital need for dialogue and collective action. The devastating bush fires in Australia are a terrible reminder of the potential impact of rising temperatures on the world.

As we have said before, no country alone can hope to overcome the threat of climate change as is the case with many other of the most pressing global challenges. It needs all nations to agree and act together if the right solutions are to be agreed upon and put in place.

It is why President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's commitment to continue promoting dialogue and cooperation on the international stage is as critical in this new decade as ever. The trust and good relations Kazakhstan has forged with nations, big and small, gives the country an important role, as has been the case in the past, in bringing countries together.

On the domestic front as well, Kazakhstan's President is showing the importance he attaches to dialogue with the country's citizens. The new National Council of Public Trust is just one way that he is delivering on his promise to develop a "Hearing States" that can meet the needs, concerns and ambitions of the Kazakh people. This wider engagement with civic society is seen as key to accelerating the creation of a modern, responsive state – the next stage in the country's remarkable development.

needs, concerns and ambitions of the Kazakh people. This wider engagement with civic society is seen as key to accelerating the creation of a modern, responsive state – the next stage in the country's remarkable development.

Nor have we had to wait long to see the action on popular priorities with measures to strengthen the criminal justice system, accelerate political reform and ensure opportunity is extended to all. Tougher penalties have been introduced for sexual and domestic violence to increase protection for women and bring Kazakhstan into line with other developed nations.

Jail sentences for human traffickers have also been increased to underline Kazakhstan's determination to stamp out this evil trade. Growing public worries over the accidents and injuries caused by drunk driving have also led to stronger prison terms.

But at the same time as toughening jail sentences, including for selling drugs to children, President Tokayev is making the moratorium on the death penalty permanent. He has instructed the government to begin the process of signing the International Treaty on abolishing capital punishment.

We have seen as well an acceleration of political and social reforms. Women and younger people are to make up 30 percent of party candidates to ensure more diverse voices in national and regional politics. Regulations over organising and attending peaceful rallies are being relaxed and made clearer. The membership threshold for registering political parties is being halved while political debate will also be helped by de-criminalising defamation. President Tokayev is acting on his promise to accelerate political reform and pluralism.

There has been action, too, on extending opportunity and increasing support to those who need it most. Along with additional investment to improve health care across the country, new rehabilitation centres to help those with disabilities are being built. Children from low-income families are to receive a guaranteed social package, including free school meals and transportation to and from school. University scholarships are being increased to develop the rich potential of the country's younger generation.

It is a packed agenda. The new decade promises to be an exciting one for the citizens of Kazakhstan who can look forward to their priorities being met through responsive services and targeted investment. The wider, open dialogue, which is already underway, is critical to finding the right solutions. On the international stage as well, it is dialogue – no matter how difficult the environment or deep the divisions – which is the only way forward to global peace, stability and prosperity.

Turkestan becomes centre of investments and business activity

Staff Report

More than a year and a half has passed since the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a decree establishing a new region (oblast) with an administrative centre in Turkestan. Today, ancient Turkestan is turning into a modern city, while maintaining its historic appearance. Turkestan has long been a centre of trade due to its geographic location along the Silk Road. All this creates favourable conditions to develop the regional economy and increase the tourist flow.

Deputy Akim (Governor) Meirzhan Myrzaliyev, who oversees developing entrepreneurship and tourism, investments and environment, spoke about the region's biggest achievements over the past year in an exclusive interview with Kazpravda.kz.

Given the history and entrepreneurial population of the Turkestan region, how are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) developing right now? At the beginning of the year, Elbasy – Leader of the Nation launched the programme to develop the simple things economy industries. Could you tell us about the preliminary results of this programme?

That's right. Life has been always active here. Our people are hardworking and entrepreneurial. Therefore, SME development is one of the pillars of the region's economy. Today, the region is a leader in the number of operating SMEs.

During tze year, this indicator increased by 12 percent, while the national average is 7.8 percent. Per these statistics, the region has a big drive to do business.

Our region is also No. 1 in developing the economy of simple things. There are 316 projects worth 61 billion tenge (US\$158.1 million) in the piggy bank, 104 projects worth 15 billion (US\$38.9 million) have been approved to date and 70 projects have been funded for 12.3 billion tenge (US\$31.9 million).

We can achieve this thanks to the coordinated work of the governor's office, second-tier banks and a branch of Agrarian Credit Corporation. We have built work with financial organisations in the "manual" mode with a discussion of each project. Moreover, due to the lack of full-fledged branches of second-tier banks in the region, we consider potential participants at weekly meetings with the participation of programme operators to improve measures and optimise the processes for obtaining soft loans.

To provide social support to large families and young entrepreneurs, some special programmes called Kasipker Ana and Zhas Kasipker were developed for 2019 with a rate of 1 percent and up to two million tenge (US\$5,184).

Also, in view of the emergency in the city of Arys, the Kamkor programme was adopted with the same one percent interest rate for business entities affected by the explosions. Under the programme, 70 businesses overall received 400 million tenge (US\$1.05 million).

Thanks to measures taken by the governor's office to support SMEs, during the 11 months the volume of their products has grown by 35.2 percent compared to the same period of 2018. At the same time, together with the regional Department of the State Revenue Committee, we are also working to bring the businesses out of the shadows by providing 100-percent implementation of online cash registers and usage of POS (point of sale) terminals.

What is being done to support exporters? Are there companies in the region whose products could compete in the foreign market?

Approximately 224 exporting companies work in our region with an export basket of more than 200 types of products. We are in contact with them and aware of their activities and needs.

The main measures of export support are mainly concentrated at the central level of state companies such as Kazakh Export, Kazakhstan Industry and Export Centre, Qaz Industry, etc. Our task here is to ensure the timely and full involvement of our enterprises in obtaining support from the region's exporters. At the same time, aiding in solving problematic issues on entering foreign markets is sometimes also critical for exporters.

The state provides various types of support to the exporters; the companies receive privileges and preferences. Thanks to the informational and explanatory work of the Turkistan Invest Export Development Centre, within two months from when the rules for the reimbursement of part of the costs came into force, we could increase the number of applications



Meirzhan Myrzaliyev

from zero to 23, a total of 294 million tenge (US\$762,000).

Along with this, Kentau Transformer Plant and Gazprom Neft – Bitumen Kazakhstan LLP received credit insurance in Kazakh Export for 908 million tenge (US\$2.4 million).

In parallel with the support of existing export industries, we are actively working on the implementation of export-oriented investment projects.

In the coming year, we plan to continue this work with the active involvement of the resources of the Regional Council for Export Development and the project office based on the Atameken Scientific Production Enterprise. In total, imports reached \$345 million; exports, \$574 million. These figures indicate that the export potential of the region is developing; if earlier imports always outstripped exports in terms of turnover, then today, it is clear that exports are showing growth dynamics.

How attractive is the region for investors nowadays? What is being done to attract investors? During the period since the region was established, what has been done on this?

Ancient Turkestan is turning into a beautiful modern city today while maintaining its historical appearance, which attracts tourists and investors from all over the world. So, today the rate of investment in fixed assets has grown by 25 percent compared to the same period in 2018 and external investment amounted to 46 billion tenge (US\$119.2 million), which exceeds all our expectations.

For investors, we have created a special economic zone with a total area of about 4,000 hectares and the new Turkistan industrial zone. In the industrial zone, international experience is applied in the construction of ready-to-use sites for investors on preferential terms. This year, we expect the completion of two such buildings.

To provide investors with a one-stop-shop, the Turkistan Invest regional agency provides investors with support on all stages of project implementation. This work is carried out in close cooperation with the regional representative office of Kazakh Invest.

A successful example is the launch of an investment project for the construction of an industrial greenhouse in the Keles District, where Eco-Culture Agro-Industrial Holding, a large agricultural holding from Russia, brought \$1.3 billion.

Overall, this year 18 investors were attracted to the region, including 16 foreign companies, with projects worth more than 832 billion tenge (US\$2.2 billion). In addition, through 2024, we have compiled a pool of 374 projects for 3.4 trillion tenge (US\$8.8 billion), of which 70 projects were implemented in 2019 in the amount of 123 billion tenge (US\$318.9 million), creating 2,600 jobs.

At the same time, I would like to note the potential of investing in tourism of the region. We have already begun implementing projects such as Kaskasu Ski Resort and Caravansarai. These will be two powerful anchor projects in tourism.

Let's talk about tourism. Big bets are being made on the development of tourism. In this regard, the Turkestan region is very lucky – there are a huge number of places interesting to tourists. But even with all this, we need special conditions. What work is being done in this direction?

Right, and that is why now a lot of work is underway in the region to develop infrastructure and attract investments. It should be noted here that the city of Turkestan is included in the top 10 tourist sites of the National Tourism Development Programme for 2019-2025.

In addition, one of the subzones of the Turkistan industrial zone with an area of 297 hectares has a tourist destination and investors there receive tax and customs preferences.

Now in Turkestan, many infrastructure and tourist facilities are under construction. Like, for example, the visitor centre, the Great Silk Road Handicraft Centre, the Rixos Turkestan Hotel, the international airport, the Yassawi Museum and others.

In addition, in 2020 there are plans to commission the Yassawi Museum, Uly Dala Eli Centre, congress hall, drama theatre, airport, city amusement park, etc.

At the same time, the main goal is to preserve the historical appearance of Turkestan during construction. Therefore, we are very pleased that on July 4, at the 43rd session of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in Baku (Azerbaijan), a project for the improvement of the territory adjacent to the Yassawi Mausoleum was approved. We are doing everything right, and this is confirmed by international experts.

We hope that these measures increase the tourist flow. Annually, the mausoleum is visited by 1.5 million tourists. This shows how great the tourism potential of Turkestan is. The plans are to increase the number of tourists to five million people by 2025. We are pursuing the goal of increasing recognition and popularisation of the Turkestan region; for that, ten routes and dozens of various ad videos were created. We also connect embassies and Kazakh Tourism to the development of tourism in the region and expect them to be promoted and advertised.

In today's world, young people absorb information through the Internet and social networks; in this regard, videos will be posted on social networks. This event will have a multiplier effect and will serve as a good informational and advertising move for the Turkestan region.

Unfortunately, with the onset of cold weather, photos of smog over Turkestan began to appear on the network. This is a serious problem that can scare off foreign tourists and investors who are concerned about the environment. How does the governor's office plan to resolve this issue?

Smog is one of the serious issues. The main reason is the lack of gasification. Today, there is a gasification project for the region and it is being implemented. I note the region is 46 percent ready for gasification. Of the 78 settlements, 30 have already been connected, 48 have developed road maps and by the end of the year, there are plans to connect 20 settlements. The remaining 28 are planned for connection before the end of next year. By 2025, we plan to gasify 95 percent of the region.

As for the city of Turkestan itself, it is gasified by 26 percent – this is about 20,000 consumers. The gasification project of the city includes 11 stages, seven of which were completed by the end of 2019. On the streets that are ready to connect, there are residential buildings and business facilities; gasification coverage is expanding every day and respectively, the amount of smog is decreasing. Very soon, we won't have this issue.

We connect to the gas and we carry out the work; but at the same time, the citizens also need to be active in collecting and submitting the necessary documents.

In addition, to protect the environment we are building a green belt around the city – about 300,000 seedlings have been planted so far and this is only the beginning. The total planting area exceeds 7,700 hectares, which will accommodate 3.5 million trees. This will help the city cope with the negative consequences of rapid urbanisation and significantly improve the ecology of Turkestan. I want to note that, on behalf of the governor of the Turkestan region, a set of measures is being developed to improve the environment. I hope that next year eco-activists will not have that many complaints against us. At the same time, taking this opportunity, I want to invite everyone to our region to see for themselves that here there are the most favourable conditions for entrepreneurs, investors and for those who may want to live here.

What are your plans for 2020?

In short, we plan to continue implementing investment projects, begin the launch phase of those projects that are planned for 2020, expand the base of export companies and attract more tourists. As you know, First President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Turkestan, got acquainted with the progress of construction and set new tasks. One of them is to hold the summit of the heads of Central Asian countries. This suggests that all tourist facilities should be ready to receive a large amount of visitors. I will be able to speak on this more only after some time, when we have results.

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The Astana Times

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BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

MOST Business Incubator supports Central Asian, youth startups



The participants of the Jastar Business, a youth entrepreneurship development programme.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Jastar Business, a youth entrepreneurship development programme, and the Central Asia ImpactTech Accelerator Programme were named among the best projects initiated by the MOST Business Incubator in 2019, the company recently announced.

The MOST Business Incubator, Citi Foundation and the YBI international organisation implemented the Jastar Business project to draw more startup companies and entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan to MOST.

The company conducted a survey of business people, startups and investors at the beginning of the year to assess prospects for the development of youth entrepreneurship and the country's investment climate.

Four startup competitions with the participation of 500 people were held in the capital and in Almaty from February to March.

Some 1,300 people completed the training course and received certificates from MOST's online pre-acceleration programme.

After the training, selected startup entrepreneurs took part in a three-month acceleration programme. Fifty teams out of 105 applications were selected, and seven teams attracted investments worth 25 million tenge (US\$65,520).

Last December, the MOST Business Incubator completed its 10th Central Asia ImpactTech Accelerator Programme. The project was implemented with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with the support of QazTech Ventures. Its objective was to identify the most promising startups in Central Asia in four areas: "Financial Inclusion," "TravelTech," "AgriTech" and "HealthTech."

At the end of the programme, the entrepreneurs presented their projects for potential investors at the Startup Social Almaty.

Eleven startups that reached the finals of the ImpactTech Accelerator Programme were awarded certificates.

"The audience liked the unique format of the Startup Social Almaty, according to the positive feedback. We are pleased that more than 100 entrepreneurs from Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Karaganda, Shymkent and other cities attended our event. We plan to organise more events in the future," director of the MOST Business Incubator Alim Khamitov told attendees.

The project included Startup Huddle Almaty, a series of local events during which more than 200 entrepreneurs presented their projects and received feedback from investors, government officials and independent experts.

The ADB Ventures fund allocated grant financing of up to \$15,000. After the Acceleration Programme, startups assessed as having the most growth potential

can apply for further financing of up to \$200,000.

The Central Asia Impact Fund (CAIF) announced plans to support the successful startups and to provide financing from \$100,000 to \$500,000.

More than 150 applications from Kazakhstan and other countries were registered for the acceleration programme. Only 13 teams passed the selection, among them entrepreneurs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Founded in 2015, the MOST Business Incubator has conducted 10 acceleration programmes, four mentoring programmes and three online courses. Every year, more than 1,000 young entrepreneurs participate in MOST projects.

Over the years, MOST has attracted more than \$2 million in investments. In 2019, the company attracted approximately 130 million tenge (US\$340,705) for startup development.

Future Capital Technologies creates first payroll service

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

NUR-SULTAN – Future Capital Technologies has launched Pay-Day, a service that allows employees to receive their salary any day of the month. The new programme will help ease individual debt burden and reduce companies' salary budgets.

The firm creates and implements IT projects that provide simpler and more efficient solutions for the obsolete and complex processes currently in use in Kazakhstan and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), said Director Tamerlan Kokush.

"The goal of our company is to identify business processes and to modernise and simplify them. At the moment, we have launched the revolutionary PayDay service, which is not like other salary management services and which will allow company employees to receive their money for the period worked at any time. Our team has developed a system that will allow the employer to save the salary budget," he said, according to Forbes.kz.

The concept is fundamentally different from those of banks and microfinance organisations, because of its unique nature and lack of competition in the market.

"People in the United States and the U.K. are already using similar services that Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg have invested in. I sincerely hope that in the future, due to the use of such financial technologies, the debt burden on people from banks and microfinance organisations will decrease," he noted.

"I found that the government spends almost four trillion tenge (US\$10.5 billion) on salaries of civil servants and that this figure is increasing from year to year, while

jobs are being reduced. Also, after analysing we found out that people are used to taking loans from banks and microfinance organisations just to buy basic necessities. As a result, they are losers due to huge percentages, fines and penalties. One explanation for the existence of such a practice is that workers in Kazakhstan do not have any access to advance salary payments or the process of receiving such payments is very complicated and time-consuming," he added.

"Our team is obsessed with solving the most complex and pressing issues. Today in our country, the development of e-commerce is relevant."

The company is planning to expand to Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan in the near future.

"Our team is obsessed with solving the most complex and pressing issues. Today in our country, the development of e-commerce is relevant. We have already begun to develop a platform for online distribution and integration of marketplaces. In the future, plans are to create a remote transmission of energy through microwaves. Most people are skeptical about our ideas, but after their implementation they are shocked. Thanks to imagination, team cohesion and the reliability of partners, I am sure that we will achieve great technological progress, as well as provide an incentive for a new generation," said Kokush.

AIFC Court, IAC consider five cases in 2019

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

NUR-SULTAN – The Astana International Financial Centre Court (AIFC Court) and International Arbitration Centre (IAC) considered five cases in 2019. The achievement was significant compared to the experiences of similar common law financial centre courts and international arbitration centres at this stage of their operation.

"2019 has been a very productive year of achievement for the AIFC Court and IAC. Ahead of expectations for our type of new court and arbitration centre, we have received and managed several cases and achieved quick enforcement of our first case at the AIFC Court. We have developed and launched the very best digital technology. We have hired the best Kazakh national registry staff and trained them to international standards with our partners in London and Singapore," said AIFC Court and IAC Registrar and Chief Executive Christopher Campbell-Holt.

"We have launched outstanding new services and raised regional and international recognition with 17 cooperation agreements signed. Our dispute resolution is quick, accessible, cost effective, impartial and, above all, incorruptible. We have exciting plans for 2020 and look forward to our continued success as we strive to be the number one choice for commercial dispute resolution in Central Asia," he added.

Earlier this year, the AIFC Court considered its first litigation and gave judgment in a small claims contract non-payment dispute involving an AIFC participant and foreign party. All enforcement measures available in Kazakhstan

were implemented quickly and directly between the AIFC Court and national enforcement authorities. This case was managed 100 percent electronically from initiation to completion.

IAC recently received its first arbitration case and hosted three mediation cases. All were managed quickly in accordance with the best international standards of case management and without charge to the parties.

The AIFC Court and IAC participated in meetings this year with senior lawyers and executives at corporations in the country, the Central Asian region and globally, signing approximately 1,300 business contracts for future dispute resolution purposes.

Both entities also launched their eJustice systems to enable parties to have their commercial disputes resolved electronically and without charge using the most up-to-date digital technology. The AIFC Court initiated new international standard services for judicial mediation and IAC started a special arbitration-mediation or "arbm-ed" procedure.

The two organisations signed cooperation agreements with leading dispute resolution centres, law societies and business associations in Kazakhstan, the U.K. and Asia, significantly raising their profile and international recognition.

More than 300 Kazakh law students, lawyers and academics studied at the AIFC Court and IAC to ensure they have the common law dispute resolution skills necessary to represent clients at the organisations. For this purpose, they partnered with Cambridge University, leading attorneys from London and its Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution.

Baiterek Holding creates venture capital fund, pursues long-term construction projects in 2020

Continued from Page A1

"DBK provides loans to enterprises, then direct investment funds included in the structure of KCM provide equity financing in the form of a contribution to the capital of the project company. Private equity funds are usually included in the project for a period of five-seven years. At the end of this period, the project applicant redeems its share," he said.

On Dec. 23, Baiterek became the first financial institution in Kazakhstan to receive the ESG rating that assesses the sustainable development of an organisation's activities.

"The rating agency experts have confirmed a high level of commitment to the principles of social responsibility, corporate governance and business ethics. At the same time, experts noted the need to consider environmental principles in the framework of project activities, including environmental risk management," according to the holding's press service.

Considering the rating results, Baiterek has developed measures to improve sustainable develop-



Aidar Arifkhanov

ment management practices and the quality of non-financial information disclosure.

It was also scheduled to create Kazakhstan's first venture capital fund. QazTech Ventures, the holding's subsidiary, and 500 Startups, the leading U.S. venture capital fund, signed an agreement Dec. 10 adding the Kazakh branch to the V Global Fund.

The document envisions QazTech Ventures' \$10-million participation in the V Global Fund "with further financing of Kazakhstan startup projects," said the Baiterek

press service. The total size of the fund is \$150 million.

San Francisco-based 500 Startups is interested in working with QazTech Ventures to create a separate thematic fund focused on Kazakhstan.

"The signing of the package of documents, we believe, will certainly lead to positive results. In particular, investments of a leading venture company in Kazakh projects will increase the attractiveness of our country's venture market and attract other key players. In addition, Kazakh projects will have the opportunity of international acceleration and access to advanced competencies and experience," said Arifkhanov, reported the press service.

Later QazTech Ventures also signed a memorandum with Quest Ventures Foundation, a leading venture capital fund in Singapore, as well as a tripartite memorandum with the National Agency for Innovation of Thailand and Baiterek Holding.

"The countries of Southeast Asia were able to make a significant breakthrough in the development of their economies thanks to the recently adopted and successfully implemented strategy for the development

of innovations and venture financing. Over the past five years, Asia's VC (venture capital) indicators have increased by almost 14 times," the Baiterek press service said.

Baiterek has received "offers from a number of venture management companies in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea and the United States" since the beginning of 2019. The holding chose 500 Startups after "an analysis of the compliance of the proposals of venture management companies with the preliminary criteria established by the investment regulations," he added.

Established in 2010, 500 Startups has created 21 funds – five global funds investing in startup projects around the world and 15 thematic funds focused on individual international regions. The latter are purposefully invested in Brazil, Canada, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the Middle East, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam, among other countries.

Baiterek Holding manages 11 state development institutions, financial organisations and national companies. It attracted approximately \$2.95 billion in foreign investment from 2016 to the first half of 2019.



The Aktau seaport on the Caspian Sea is one of the strategic projects funded by Baiterek Holding through DBK.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

Shymkent to launch third industrial zone in 2020



By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Zhuldyz, Shymkent’s third, 306-hectare industrial zone, will be launched next year, reported Akim (Mayor) Yerlan Aitakhanov at a Dec. 25 press conference in the city. A 136-hectare agro-industrial zone will also be opened.

Greenhouses on a 14-hectare site were also commissioned this year, expanding the total area of city greenhouses to 183.5 hectares in conjunction with a 708-hectare orchard and berry area.

Investors intend to implement 20 nutrition, construction, metallurgy, medicine and engineering projects in the industrial zone worth more than 20 billion tenge (US\$52 million). Twenty projects worth 109 billion tenge (US\$286 million) and creating 1,000 jobs will be executed in the agro-industrial zone.

Greenhouses on a 14-hectare site were also commissioned this year, expanding the total area of city greenhouses to 183.5 hectares in conjunction with a 708-hectare orchard and berry area. A 1.5 billion tenge (US\$4 million) apple orchard is also planned for a 152-hectare tract. Approximately 2.9 billion tenge (US\$7 million) in subsidies were issued to support rural entrepreneurs.

Industrial production increased by 16.4 percent, agricultural production by 5.5 percent, commissioned housing by 15.3 percent and retail trade by 7.1 percent in the first 11 months of 2019, noted Aitakhanov.

“Population and business activity, as well as economic power, have increased since Shymkent became the country’s third city of national significance. Industry is of great importance for the sustainable development of the economy. This year, seven projects worth 26 billion tenge (US\$68 million) were implemented and 389 jobs were created,” he said.

Sixty-seven projects worth \$42

billion are being implemented in the Ontustik and Tassay industrial zones. The zones employ nearly 4,000 and collect 16 billion tenge (US\$42 million) in taxes. Foreign investors contributed \$2.5 billion to the projects, including 15 investment projects implemented with American stakeholder participation.

“We met with investors from China, Russia, Turkey, the UAE (United Arab Emirates), Singapore, South Korea and Uzbekistan. A spinning mill was launched this December with the participation of Uzbek investors. There are plans to produce 60 tonnes of cotton by the end of this year and up to 6,000 tonnes of raw cotton next year. Textile products will be exported to China, Italy, Russia, South Korea and Turkey in the future,” he added.

Two dormitories accommodating 350 and 200 people were built as part of the Five Social Initiatives. A dormitory for 2,500 is expected to be constructed next year.

A per capita financing system was introduced in educational institutions for the new academic year, which resulted in opening 11 private schools with 5,000 students. Local authorities financed construction of nine schools for 5,700 students. Five schools have been commissioned and private investors will build 10 schools in the next three years.

Investors will also construct a new airport terminal to be completed in 2020. The railway station will be rebuilt next year.

Major repairs were completed on 43 streets. Asphalt works will cover 80 streets in 40 remote villages and public transport will be launched in 2020.

Aitakhanov also noted positive dynamics in healthcare. The maternal mortality decreased by 63.6 percent, cancer mortality by 4.6 percent and tuberculosis deaths by 6.6 percent.

“A three-year development plan has been adopted to improve healthcare. Approximately 100 vehicles were purchased to update the fleet of ambulance services. A single call centre will be launched to improve the quality of services. Two major projects were implemented through public-private partnerships. The Mediker medical centre was built for 20,000-30,000 people. A clinic in the Kaitpas-1 micro district will be commissioned in January. A hospital with 1,000 beds will also be built,” he said.

Law on Cinema to increase country’s attractiveness with support centre, 30-percent rebate, unified cinema ticket

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – The Law on Cinema which Kazakhstan adopted as of Jan. 3 has brought many positive changes to film industry management. Kazakh movie makers have waited for the law for many years, said National Cinema Support Centre Chair Gulnara Sarsenova.

“For me as an independent film producer, these are very big changes that can make the big breakthrough possible of our Kazakh cinema in an international film industry,” she told The Astana Times in an exclusive interview.

The changes include a 30-percent rebate system for foreign film production companies, with the Kazakh government prepared to subsidise 30 percent of the expenses incurred by foreign movie makers who choose to shoot their films in the country. The figure represents substantial financial support.

“(The rebate is) the most powerful leverage of stimulating foreign companies to come to the territory of our country for shooting, because everyone wants to spend a little less money on movie making,” she said.

Sarsenova noted seven film production companies, such as Canal+ (France), TNT (Russia) and Premier media-service provider, as well as a few Chinese and Indian film production companies, are prepared to bring \$26 million into the Kazakh economy.

National Cinema Support Centre is also one of the “after the law” products which the Ministry of Culture and Sports founded in May as a non-profit joint stock company. The centre’s main concern is to ensure the country’s movies are



Gulnara Sarsenova

competitive, as well as introduce its breath-taking locations.

She expects major movies to increase tourist flow in Kazakhstan along the lines of what “Lord of the Rings” and “Game of Thrones” did for New Zealand and Croatia, respectively.

The cinema support centre plans to register with the Association of Film Commissioners International. Membership should introduce Kazakh landscapes to foreign movie makers as the commission “conducts four or five location exhibitions a year,” she said.

“In the territory of Kazakhstan, it is possible to find a location for up to eight planets. We have Mars, the Moon and Jupiter. We can shoot anything. We can do science fiction movies,” she noted. “We have a unique location... We wait for a big boom.”

“But for that boom, the invasion of foreign production companies, we should also get prepared, because foreign movie companies not only bring their own actors and crew, but they should be interested

in recruiting a film crew from local movie makers. It is cheaper and better,” she added.

The centre is attempting to create a single national commission that will help manage foreign sets. Shooting “Marco Polo” in Kazakhstan was “a sad experience,” she recalled, as 15 of 25 locals recruited to be the part of the film crew were translators.

“We have many movie companies where 30 percent are speaking in English. Ideally, I’d like to have 100, or at least 70,” she said.

There is plenty of room for improvement in the Kazakh film industry, a situation that the Cinema Support Centre must address. Movie theatres revenue has long been a shadow economy, as they hide actual income and report fewer visitors. That is one of the major reasons why big businesses are cautious in entering the market, said Sarsenova.

National Cinema Support Centre, therefore, plans to introduce a unified cinema ticket, or unified automated monitoring system. The ticket would allow tracking the actual numbers of movie goers and, possibly, providing more information about their genre preferences and gender, among other details. The system should guarantee movie theatres pay taxes and provide valuable audience analytics for movie makers.

“(It would be activated) in any cinema at the moment one buys a ticket. In a simple app, a user who is a producer, a director and anyone interested can see that and say ‘Yay! A ticket was sold to my movie!’ This everyday report can help to see, analyse and understand the box office of a movie. Box office is the results of the sale, the commercial result for which the film was

released for general rent,” she said.

Russia has been using such a ticket for the last five years and “has been having a big leap up.” The app can show nearly 160 parameters of Russian movie-goer’s habits and preferences, which made it possible to “collect approximately \$12 billion just in its own market,” she noted.

“I hope next year, we will have the same system in Kazakhstan... In the beginning, (we will try to) persuade, then the penalty system and then we will attract fiscal authorities. Hidden income is first an administrative, then a criminal offence,” she added.

Kazakh film distributors will also be exempt from corporate taxes in dispensing national films. The “national film” certificate will free an author from the 20 percent corporate income tax. “I think it is a big motivation for the distributors,” said Sarsenova.

The cinema support centre, combined with the new law, will now also partially or fully fund independent film production companies and independent film producers if they develop socially significant projects.

“Next year we have the 175th year anniversary of Abai (Kunanbayev, Kazakh poet and writer), our great enlightener. We have a budget to make full length movies about the artistic disclosure of this theme. There will be 100-percent financing,” she said.

National Cinema Support Centre will also support co-production projects filmed in the country. Such funding is possible provided the filmmakers have already attracted at least 50 percent of the proposed budget through foreign support.

Company launches electronic government, private sector document exchange service

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Doculite cloud system now offers Kazakh entrepreneurs the opportunity to exchange documents directly with government bodies in electronic legal form. The service, introduced in November, is available to all companies regardless of their size and scope of activity.

The system was created by Documentolog that has been developing and implementing electronic document management solutions in the Kazakh market for more than 12 years. Doculite has been integrated into the government’s unified electronic document management system, facilitating electronic exchange between companies and government agencies.

The system is currently used mostly by small and medium-sized businesses involving approximately 12,000 individuals and 7,000 organisations. To date, more than 250,000 letters have been sent between companies within the country.

Doculite significantly reduces entrepreneurs’ time and costs, as there is no longer the need to submit hard copies of documents.

“To make an exchange with government bodies, there is a need, at the request of the electronic government gateway, (to have) mandatory encryption for all data, so that no one can read you or hack you or see the contents of the document,” said Doculite development department head Bakhtiyar Alimbayev in an interview with 24.kz.

Organisations are automatically connected to Doculite once they submit an electronic application. The system allows entrepreneurs to send outgoing emails with digital signatures to all government bodies and track document execution and status by entering the unique code assigned to the document. Quasi-state companies are able to receive electronic messages sent by government agencies through egov.kz, the electronic government portal.

Entrepreneurs can also use the Doculite website to check counterparties for reliability and evaluate cooperation security.

In addition, the service allows companies to receive an ST-KZ certificate, an export and industrial document for Kazakh citizens issued by the Atameken National

Chamber of Entrepreneurs. Business owners can apply for the certificate electronically using a digital signature and are not tied to a specific location. The new system has reduced the wait time from two weeks to one day.

Documentolog, a leader in the IT sector in the domestic market, was named best IT company in Kazakhstan at the 2018 Digital Bridge Awards. This year, the firm announced its entry into the Russian market.

“Recently, we launched the doculite.ru service in test mode for Russian companies... of course, we expect Russian companies to exchange between Russia and Kazakhstan,” said Documentolog Deputy Director General Madina Dusmagambetova in the same interview.

AIFC issues license to captive insurer firm, signaling support for companies relocating operations, assets to Kazakhstan

By Yerbolat Uatkhanov

NUR-SULTAN – Astana Financial Services Authority (AFSA) issued a license Kazakhstan Energy Reinsurance Company (KERC), a captive insurer firm, setting a precedence for the nation’s companies to transfer operations and capital to the country.

A captive insurer is a licensed insurance company created by a parent company to provide coverage for itself. As a captive insurer, KERC will conduct the regulated activities of effecting and carrying out insurance under Astana International Financial Centre

(AIFC) acts. “The transfer of incorporation of the Kazakhstan Energy Reinsurance Company to the AIFC gives a clear message that the legal framework of the AIFC supports Kazakh companies willing to relocate operations and assets to Kazakhstan through the AIFC, where a regulatory regime is well placed for doing financial services business and the protection of investments,” said AFSA Acting Chief Executive Officer Mukhtar Bubeyev.

Transferring KERC’s incorporation to the AIFC marks a positive process of relocating Kazakh capital and assets from foreign jurisdictions. According

to AIFC regulations, the transfer allows KERC to continue to have all the property, rights and privileges and be subject to all the liabilities, restrictions and

ance business within the company and Samruk Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund, its parent holding company.

KERC’s shareholder is Coopera-

Transferring KERC’s incorporation to the AIFC marks a positive process of relocating Kazakh capital and assets from foreign jurisdictions.

debts that it had before the incorporation.

KERC, an affiliated company of KazMunayGas, carries on insur-

ance KazMunaiGaz U.A., which is registered outside Kazakhstan. As part of the country’s investment reforms, AIFC is working to accel-

erate the nation’s economic growth and has implemented a regulatory regime that allows attracting capital, including repatriating assets, to the country. KERC has been operating in Bermuda since 2004 and the incorporation transfer or re-domiciliation to AIFC will allow it to transfer all legal rights and liabilities to the new entity, which is the same legal entity as the original overseas-incorporated company, as well as become the subject of tax preferences and legal regulation in accordance with international standards.

“We believe that the AIFC opens new opportunities for large companies conducting international

business. This is a good opportunity and we are pleased to take advantage of what this jurisdiction offers. This is not our first transaction on this platform, but we took advantage of the opportunity to transfer company incorporation to the AIFC jurisdiction for the first time. We hope that the AIFC will continue to be a flexible and convenient platform for business,” said KazMunayGas Managing Director/Financial Controller Aigul Beknazarova.

AFSA, AIFC’s independent regulator, was established to manage the centre’s financial services and is legal entity and statutory body of Kazakhstan.

PEOPLE

Young entrepreneurs foster cooperation between Kazakh, South Korean medical centres

B2

CULTURE

Yevgeny Vakhtangov Theatre performs at Astana Opera

B3

SPORTS

Golovkin ranks among top 10 boxers in world, fights among best of decade

B7

Kazakh anti-nuclear anthem inspires activists across languages, decades



Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev visits Hiroshima in 2016.

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh anti-nuclear protest song “Zaman-ai” has been inspiring activists for decades. Most recently, it was recorded and released by Japanese singer Michida Ryoko in Japanese and English last year.

“Zaman-ai” was translated into Japanese and English in 2003 at the initiative of leaders of the Hiroshima Semipalatinsk Project (HiroSemi), a Japanese civil group that provides medical aid to radiation victims in the Semipalatinsk region and accepts Kazakh students to study in Japanese high schools. The first CD was released in 2010.

“Zaman-ai” is an anthem of the Nevada Semipalatinsk international anti-nuclear movement, which called for the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in Kazakhstan. It was the site of the four decades of weapons testing by the former Soviet Union.

“I can’t forget the shock of hearing this song for the first time. In the

distant region of Central Asia, hearing the cry of the souls of those who had suffered from nuclear weapons... all the people there were sharing their sorrows from the bottom of their hearts,” said Vice Director of HiroSemi Chieko Kobatake in an interview for this story.

Kobatake heard the song for the first time Aug. 29 1999, when she arrived with 11 other delegates from Hiroshima in Semipalatinsk. On that day, thousands of local people and hundreds of nuclear victims launched 300 floating water lanterns on Yertis River to commemorate those who lost their lives. During the lantern floating ceremony, “Zaman-ai” was played many times.

Kobatake was moved by the sound of the Kazakh melody of “Zaman-ai.” The song helped change people’s minds across borders and time, she added. This brought her to the idea of translating the song and introducing it in Japan.

In the following year, in 2000, two Kazakh students studying in Japan through the HiroSemi programme, Akerke Sultanova and

Amina Kassymbekova, performed “Zaman-ai” Aug. 6 at the riverside of the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima. Three years later, Sultanova and two Kazakh students introduced the Japanese version of the song to the public for the first time. Since then, the song has been performed by Kazakh students arriving in Hiroshima every year.

In 2009, Roza Rymbayeva, famous Kazakh national singer and the original performer of “Zaman-ai,” performed the song in Semei, which was broadcast to the world.

“Everyone who heard her singing voice requested her CD and Japanese translation,” said Kobatake.

The demand prompted HiroSemi to release a CD track of “Zaman-ai” based on Sultanova’s and Kobatake’s translated versions. The CD cover was made by painter Hiroki Kawasaki. By releasing the Kazakh anti-nuclear song in Japanese, HiroSemi desired to link the power of the civil movement that forced the closure of the test site in Kazakhstan to the elimination of nuclear weapons in the world, said Kobatake.

In 2012, after the Tohoku earthquake, Rymbayeva travelled to Hiroshima to hold concerts and meetings and give lectures. During the visit, Rymbayeva performed the song with Japanese singer Ryoko.

“Thanks to the Japanese translation, ‘Zaman-ai’ has reached the hearts of Japanese people as a message... From this song, many Japanese were able to learn about the nuclear testing conducted in Kazakhstan,” Ryoko told The Astana Times.

In November 2016, Ryoko performed the song solo at the welcome reception of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Hiroshima. Two years later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan invited Ryoko to perform the Japanese translation of “Zaman-ai” at the Ruhani Kazyna Festival in the capital, the first culture and art festival dedicated to celebrating the Day of Culture and Art Workers in Kazakhstan.

Distinguished artists of Kazakhstan and authors of the song “Zaman-ai” Ulugbek Yesdaulet and Tulegen Mukhamedzhanov thanked Ryoko for her beautiful song performance at the festival.

“They [Yesdaulet and Mukhamedzhanov] told me that music creates peace. I totally agree. Even if you speak different languages, you can communicate with music,” said Ryoko.

It was her first visit to Kazakhstan.

“I fell in love with this country and its hospitality! People of Kazakhstan are very kind and friendly; the food here is very delicious,” she added.

During Ryoko’s second visit to Kazakhstan Aug. 26, 2019, she reunited with Rymbayeva in Almaty. According to Ryoko, she had been dreaming of the day she would meet Rymbayeva again.

Ryoko also performed “Zaman-ai” Aug. 28, 2019, at the 14th Environment, Radiation and Health Conference in Semei National University of Medicine. The next day, she participated in a local commemorative peace ceremony to mark the 70th anniversary of the first nuclear test and the 30th anniversary of the last day of testing in Semipalatinsk.

Three cyber players among top 30 most popular in CIS

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh cyber athletes Dauren (AdreN) Kystaubayev, Alexey (qikert) Golubev and Abay (Hobbit) Khasenov were among the top 30 most mentioned Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) players in 2019, reported Vesti.kz. All are professional Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) players.

Sports portal cybersport.ru completed a study last year on the media popularity of cyber athletes. It used indicators such as the number of views each player recorded on his/her website and twitch.tv broadcasts, reader activity and audience activity on social networks, as well as the number of search queries about the athlete.

Kystaubayev, who began his career in 2012, shared 19th place with Dota 2 player Artem (fng) Barshak of Belarus. He has amassed 400 victories, including PGL Major Kraków 2017 tournament champion. Kystaubayev was also part of AVANGAR, the Kazakh-based multi-gaming esports organisation, in 2019 when it placed in the Berlin and Moscow tournaments and he and Golubev

were signed up with Russia’s Virtus.Pro in December. He is perhaps the most popular cyber athlete in Kazakhstan.

Golubev shared 21st place with Dota 2 player Idan (MagicaL) Vardanyan from Israel. He started playing for LOG.KZ in 2017, but quickly moved to AVANGAR. Golubev played for the latter until recently, when he and other members were signed by Virtus.Pro after taking second place in August at CS:GO StarLadder Berlin Major tournament and winning Moscow’s BLAST Pro Series 2019 in September. He has recorded 186 victories, including 13 first place, four second place and eight third place tournament finishes.

Khasenov, who took 28th place in the rating, joined Russia’s Winstrike Team in October. He started his cybersports career in 2015 and has won 175 games, with six gold, four silver and seven bronze tournament finishes. Khasenov was the PGL Major Kraków 2017 tournament champion in 2017 as part of Gambit Esports, where he played the longest in his career.

The top 30 list crowned Russia’s Roman (RAMZEs) Kushnarev in first, Russia’s Alexei (Solo) Berezhin in second and Ukraine’s Iliya (ALOHADANCE) Korobkin in third.

Kazakhstan’s passport ranks 67th for visa-free travel

By Galiya Khasenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Henley & Partners, a global citizenship and residence advisory firm, has ranked Kazakhstan 67th on its 2020 Henley Passport Index. The report, released Jan. 7, rates 199 countries on their passports according to the number of destinations holders can access without a prior visa, reported inform.kz.

The rating is based on a point system, giving one point for each country to which a passport pro-

vides access. Kazakhstan has 76 points, meaning its residents can freely visit 76 countries, and shares its ranking, the same as last year, with Namibia. In 2019, Kazakhstan gained visa-free access to Saudi Arabia and Senegal, while losing access to Benin and Djibouti.

Kazakhstan ranked its highest, 64th, in 2014; its lowest, 76th, in 2015.

Japan occupies the top spot for third consecutive year, as its passports offer residents access to 191 countries.

Continued on Page B6

Burabay, Zerenda among popular weekend destinations, says tour organiser

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Burabay National Park and Zerenda recreation area are among the most popular and accessible destinations for weekend tours from the capital, said Kompas Asia co-founder Assiya Seitaliyeva.

The two locations offer a variety of activities for visitors including hiking, skiing and skating on the frozen lakes. Tourists can visit Santa Claus’ residence in Burabay, which also features numerous entertainment opportunities for both adults and children.

Families, students and schoolchildren are among those who use the company’s services. The tours have also become popular among foreign guests, the majority coming from Russia or Europe. Many international tourists learn about Kompas Asia from friends or colleagues living in the capital.

“Recently, there were guests from Dubai. They do not have snow, so they were glad to see the snow here. It was a bit cold, but they really liked the nature,” she said in an exclusive interview with The Astana Times.

Kazakh tourism has gained popularity and the number of tourists has increased in the last year, she noted. The company organises approximately five or six trips per month. More than 200 people use its services in winter and twice as many in summer.

“There is also a growing flow of

regular customers who travel with us not only in one direction, but in different directions,” she added.

The country’s tourism is unique due to its diverse landscapes and nature.

“Here (in the north), it is mountains and lakes; in the south, it is canyons, mountains. In the west, it is a semi-desert terrain and dunes,” said Seitaliyeva.

Tourists can experience various activities such as hiking in the mountains, rafting and climbing. Bayanaul National Park, Charyn Canyon, Lake Kaindy and Lake Kolsay are among her favourite

travel destinations. Many tourists from Karagandy Region, Pavlodar Region and Russia visit Bayanaul, she noted.

This year, the company plans to organise tours to so-called ethno villages, where tourists can experience Kazakh nomadic culture by riding horses, tasting national cuisine, visiting yurts, listening to national music and wearing traditional costumes. Kazakhstan has three ethno villages, and Huns ethno village is open year-round.

Kompas Asia organises trips to Bayanaul National Park, Balkhash Lake and Almaty’s falconry moun-

tains, while Yereimentau’s pink lake is a popular summer destination. Last year, the team arranged the first overseas trip to Uzbekistan, where it plans to return in March for Nauryz (the Persian/Turkic celebration of the New Year on the solar astronomical calendar). In February, the team will accompany tourists to Karakol ski resort in Kyrgyzstan.

The company is led by Seitaliyeva, her sister Dana and Zholaman Anopyanov. The siblings first came up with the idea of making travel easier for capital residents and visitors years ago, then realised the concept last May.



Photo credit: @kompas.asia Instagram page.

THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

BARYS ARENA

Jan. 16 at 7.30 p.m.	HC Barys – HC Metallurg Magnitogorsk, KHL
Jan. 20 at 7 p.m.	HC Nomad – HC Toros Neftekamsk, VHL
Jan. 22 at 7 p.m.	HC Nomad – HC Neftyanik Almetyevsk, VHL
Jan. 24 at 7 p.m.	HC Nomad – HC Izhtal Izhevsk, VHL

ASTANA OPERA

Jan. 17 at 7 p.m.	An Evening by the Fireplace, concert
Jan. 19 at 12 p.m.	Children Invite to the Opera House, concert
Jan. 21 at 7 p.m.	Offering to Ludwig Van Beethoven, concert
Jan. 25 at 5 p.m.	Abai, operatic farsa
Dec. 26 at 5 p.m.	La scala di seta, opera

ASTANA BALLET

Jan. 25, 26 at 6 p.m.	The Nutcracker, ballet
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Young entrepreneurs foster cooperation between Kazakh, South Korean medical centres

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Young Kazakh businesspeople have launched a medical tourism company in South Korea which provides free consultation services for patients from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and strengthens cooperation between Kazakh and South Korean medical centres.

“Two years ago, we became the first foreign startup in Hanyang University... There is no such tandem anywhere else. We work with different clinics in different directions,” said KazMediKor (KMK) CEO Zhanadil Taldybayev in an exclusive interview for this story.

KMK is led by Taldybayev, CIO Kakim Danabayev and CAO Kim Seula. The start-up was among the 30 best two years ago of those accepted annually by Hanyang University’s Startup Lounge, which recognised the project as the most successful startup team in 2019. One of the unique aspects is it is both a Kazakh and South Korean company and has offices in Almaty and Seoul with Kazakh and Korean staff members.

The company’s main goal is to offer the opportunity for Russian-speaking patients to contact South Korean clinics directly, thus reducing the cost of treatment. It provides advisory services for patients to assist them in finding suitable clinics for treatment, hotel book-



L-R: Kakim Danabayev, Kim Seula and Zhanadil Taldybayev.

ing services, translation services, airport shuttles to the hospital or hotel and a modem router with complimentary unlimited Internet. All services are free for patients from CIS countries.

“Many people think that we have a fee for our services and they go to other intermediary agencies where they overpay. Our services are free, useful and convenient,” he added.

The enterprise is currently working on a web platform, which can be used both by patients and clinics. Patients can contact clinics directly and doctors are able to immediately answer their questions by e-mail and monitor the entire process through the platform. The website provides an online consult-

ant available 24 hours a day and includes a news blog about South Korean medicine where people find information about new treatment methods and other useful health and medicine information.

Each South Korean clinic has its own Russian-speaking guide who can answer inquiries and facilitate communication between doctors and patients.

“Each major hospital has a Russian-speaking specialist. This is now a must because of the large number of Russian-speaking patients,” said Taldybayev. “This applies not only to simple hospitals, but also to plastic surgery clinics. Even in a small plastic surgery clinic there is a Russian-speaking coordinator.”

More than 40,000 patients from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan go to South Korea each year for treatment, he noted. Approximately 15,000 Kazakhs travel to the country annually to obtain medical services.

“Approximately 25,000 Kazakh people come to South Korea annually as tourists. Of these, more than 50 percent receive either a medical check-up or other medical services. Korea is now a country of advanced medicine,” he added.

Five-six patients per month used the company services in 2018; last year, the number increased to 15-20 individuals.

“Our goal is to provide our services to all patients who want to come to Korea,” said Taldybayev.

KMK is also seeking to provide training for Kazakh doctors in South Korea.

“Previously, you always had to do an internship in America to become a doctor in Korea. Now this is no longer necessary, because Korea is a leading country in the field of medicine. In Kazakhstan, we do not have this practice, but I think it will be implemented soon,” said Taldybayev.

Privatising Kazakh clinics will result in the need to send doctors abroad for the centres to stay competitive in the market and have highly qualified personnel.

“We think that they (doctors) will go to Korea. It is the most affordable, the closest of all possible

countries and, of course, medicine is very developed there,” he added.

The company leaders collaborate directly with South Korea hospitals. Hanyang University Seoul Hospital, Naeun Hospital and Nazareth Hospital, its strategic partners, have provided financial investment and offer free programmes for Kazakh doctors.

Last year, Naeun Hospital provided a one-month internship grant for a Kazakh neurosurgeon. KMK interviewed candidates and selected the best individual, whose training programme, accommodations and meals were fully covered by the hospital.

The business is also aiming to provide South Korean medical facilities to Kazakhstan. Working with local entrepreneur Kairat Kudaibergen, KMK plans to open a branch of Oracle Clinic in Almaty in late February or early March. Oracle Medical Group, which has a network of 48 domestic and 22 overseas clinics, also produces cosmetics and medical equipment.

The company is seeking to open three additional clinics in Kazakhstan in the next three years. It is currently working on registering Oracle medical equipment to distribute in the country.

“In Korea, their products are considered one of the top. The network of clinics is considered the largest in Korea. Their equipment was recognised as one of the most successful in South Korea,

because it is not too expensive for the Korean market and the quality is great,” said Taldybayev.

KMK also collaborates with South Korean government agencies, which provide support for its activities. Last year, the company received \$100,000 for development from the Ministry of Small and Medium Business and Startups.

“The ministry reviewed our project and understood that our company promotes tourism in South Korea in Central Asia and therefore, our company remains one of the most promising,” he said.

The firm also collaborates with the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kazakh Embassy in South Korea. Recently, it began working with the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Immigration Service.

In partnership with The Korea Foundation, a non-commercial organisation that promotes international cooperation between the country and other nations, KMK has proposed forming a special free treatment programme for Kazakh children who suffer from serious illnesses and cannot afford treatment or medical check-ups.

“Many children don’t even know their diagnosis and can’t afford the medical check-up abroad. We want to give them the opportunity at least to pass a medical check-up for free,” said Taldybayev.

With support from his strategic partners and team members, the project has become a reality. The team will continue working on various joint projects to provide the opportunity for patients from the CIS to obtain affordable and high-quality medical services and contribute to improving healthcare in Kazakhstan.

Economics researcher among 100 New Faces

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Renat Gabdullin, associate professor of economics and one of Kazakhstan’s 100 New Faces, recently discussed the country’s positive economic trends and called on youngsters to work hard to succeed in today’s highly competitive world.

The national project is aimed at highlighting the inspirational stories of a variety of successful professionals. Gabdullin is a state scholarship laureate for talented young Kazakh scientists and a member of the International Informationisation Academy and the Eurasian Economic Club of Scientists.

“Participation in 100 New Faces is a new opportunity for me; it is an incentive to improve. It motivates me to set higher goals and improve those indicators that I have already achieved,” he told The Astana Times.

Gabdullin graduated in 2004 from Almaty University of Economics World Economics faculty, majoring in international monetary and financial relations. In 2007, he graduated from full-time postgraduate study under state order from the Institute of Economics of the Ministry of Education and Science.

He specialises in economic management and theory and his particular interests are the problems of scientific and technological development, innovation, investment, globalisation and the competitiveness of national economies. Gabdullin was awarded the title of Laureate of the Prize in Science and Technology of the Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – the Leader of the Nation for the monograph “National Economy: Management of Investment and Innovative Development.”

He feels confident in the continued growth of the nation’s economy and progress of the national education system.

“Kazakhstan’s model of education continuously develops; it takes all the best components of the Western educational process and tries to implement them here,” he said. “Given today’s trends, we can be optimistic that Kazakhstan’s economy will advance in the coming year.”

In 2016, by the decision of the National Selection Committee,



Renat Gabdullin

Gabdullin was awarded the title Best University Teacher.

“Today, we need to look for new innovative teaching methods; we need to help students develop their skills and knowledge using new methods of education,” he noted.

In addition, Gabdullin headed a grant project on the topic Model of Managing the Entrepreneurial Resource of the National Economy of Kazakhstan.

“Not only Kazakh entrepreneurs want to open businesses in Kazakhstan, but also people from Russia and other neighbouring countries,” he added.

Gabdullin noted the government has done quite a bit of work both at the macro and micro levels to create favourable conditions for business development.

“Now, it is possible to register as an individual entrepreneur within three hours; all documents can be submitted online. The tax burden was reduced as much as possible for entrepreneurs,” he said.

Gabdullin is constantly improving his professional and personal competencies. He has been involved in a number of scientific internships and seminars conducted by leading educational and scientific organisations including Al-Farabi Kazakh National University Institute for Continuing Education and Further Education, Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre (MCTC), Interregional Academy of Experimental Educational and Innovative Technologies (Moscow) and Moscow State University.

He is the author of two individual and seven collective monographs and has published more than 70 scientific papers in leading and highly rated journals. He combines scientific and pedagogical work, supervising undergraduates and PhD doctoral students and passing his experience to young Kazakh scholars.

Aleph Jewish Ethno Cultural Centre organises Hanukkah celebration

By Galiya Khasenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Aleph Jewish Ethno Cultural Centre organised a celebration of Hanukkah, the eight-day festival of renovation and light, Dec. 29 in Friendship House. The centre was kind enough to invite a reporter from The Astana Times to talk about the holiday and community.

The main event was lighting the candles representing each day of Hanukkah.

“This is the light from heaven that comes into our lives. In every generation, every person receives this light. The light of love, joy, happiness, kindness, mercy – all that our fathers taught us. Let it spread it among us, our friends, guests and our country,” said centre Deputy Chair Nikolai Gorbunov.

As those assembled chanted “a great miracle happened here,” Gorbunov illuminated the candles one by one, for each day of the holiday. Hanukkah 2019 was celebrated from sundown, Dec. 22 to sundown, Dec. 30 and Dec. 29 marked the beginning of the last and most important day. The actual dates differ each year, as the Festival of Lights aligns with the Jewish calendar, which denotes

years by the sun and months by the moon.

Gorbunov recounted the Hanukkah story. More than 2,180 years ago, Judea became part of the Seleucid Empire of Syria. Its ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes invaded Judea, outlawed Judaism and destroyed the Second Temple (a holy temple for Jews, located on a mountain). Antiochus ordered erecting a statue of Zeus on the site and sacrificing a pig (an unclean, non-Kosher animal). This provoked a rebellion, which drove Antiochus and his army from Judea.

In celebration, one of the rebellion’s leaders ordered cleansing the Second Temple, building a new altar and lighting a menorah (or Hanukkah), a candlestick with eight candles. To do so, they needed to add clean oil with balms and dried herbs, which required seven days to dissolve, yet everything has been destroyed.

One of the warriors found a small, hidden jug with prepared and sealed oil, but it contained only enough for one day. The oil continued to burn for eight days until the next solution was ready and the miracle became the celebration of renovation and light.

Members of other centres visited

and congratulated the Jewish community.

“May this celebration of light and renovation bring everyone something new, renew something good in us. It is good that we have the (Friendship) House. Finally, we have a house where we can celebrate. So much space, a good, warm house, it is very important,” said Chair Oksana Richter.

The table was full of treats made by community members. Sufganiyot, similar to a jelly donut, and latkes, potato pancakes fried in oil to commemorate the oil that burned for eight days, are the traditional foods of the holiday.

Attendees were entertained by songs in Hebrew and a musical duo of violin and accordion. The two often perform their varying repertoire at Jewish and the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan events.

“Last year, we celebrated Hanukkah here (in Friendship House). We took Kazakh, Tatar and Kurdish music and everybody, including other ethno-cultural centres, danced. What is good about the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan is it united us so much we stick up for each other. All the stereotypes about other people are totally eliminated,” said Gorbunov.

In addition to serving as depu-

ty chair, he teaches free Hebrew classes on Sundays, professes Judaism and teaches the Torah.

The majority of Kazakh Jews came to the country during Soviet Union days, to “Raise Tselina,” to develop a new region. Others arrived during World War II.

“Many are grateful to the Kazakh people for their help during resettlement. People lived poorly, but still shared a piece of bread. One of the Greek centre representatives said that this is why Kazakh bread is holy for us,” he noted.

The community centre, established in 1993 by a group of teachers and other culture workers, was one of the first to become part of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Aleph was chosen as the name, as it is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The centre works on voluntary basis, operating on donations and membership fees. It is open to all.

“We try to make the people that come here interested and comfortable. We try to create a home-like atmosphere,” said Gorbunov.

“We celebrate all Jewish holidays; we try to show a little of our culture. Any person, not only Jewish, can visit our cultural centre,” said participant Maksim Nikolai-chuk.



CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

Yevgeny Vakhtangov Theatre performs at Astana Opera



Photo credit: The press service of Astana Opera House.

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Yevgeny Vakhtangov State Academic Theatre performed for the first time on the Astana Opera Grand Hall stage in 2020, reported Astana Opera press centre. The theatre presented scenes from Alexander Pushkin’s “Eugene Onegin” Jan. 8-9 and Anton Chekhov’s “Uncle Vanya” Jan. 10-11.

The world tour, which started in the fall in Paris, is dedicated to the theatre’s 100th anniversary. The first programme included the Russian dramas staged by artistic director Rimas Tuminas.

“What could be better than Pushkin, Lermontov, Chekhov, Gogol? With age, you get tired of telling the stories of plays in three acts – you want to return to literature, find a theatre in literature. You want to create the play with artists based on our experience, knowledge and culture. Touching the classics today gives us such unexpected revelations in the understanding of our time that there is simply nothing to replace it with,” he said.

“Eugene Onegin,” with music by Faustas Latenas, is choreographed by Angelica Choline with scenographer Adomas Yatsovkis, costume designer Maria Danilova

and lighting designer Maya Shavdatuashvili.

The main roles were played by theatre and cinema artists including Leonid Bichevin, Arthur Ivanov, Irina Kupchenko, Olga Lerman, Oleg Makarov, Sergey Makovetsky, Lyudmila Maksakova, Nikolai Romanovsky, Yuri Shlykov, Natalya Vinokurova and Maria Volkova.

The “Eugene Onegin” premiere was staged Feb. 13, 2013. The performance is the laureate of the Golden Mask Russian National Theatre Award, Crystal Turandot theatre award, MK theatre award and Nail of the Season STD RF award and winner of the Baltic

House Theatre Festival prize and special prize at the Spoletto Festival.

“Uncle Vanya” is produced and directed by Tuminas, with music by Latenas, scenography and costumes by Yatsovkis and lighting designed by Shavdatuashvili.

The main roles were performed by Anna Dubrovskaya, Yuri Kraskov, Evgenia Kregzhde, Lyubov Korneva, Makovetsky, Maksakova, Vitalis Semenovs, Shlykov and Vladimir Vdovichenkov.

“Uncle Vanya” premiered Sept. 2, 2009 on the eve of 150th anniversary of Chekhov’s birth. The masterpiece is a laureate of the Golden Mask Russian National Theatre Award, International Theatre Award named after Stanislavsky, Nail of the Season STD RF award, Crystal Turandot theatre and other prizes.

The two plays were well received by the public in Azerbaijan, the Baltic countries, Belarus, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Great Britain, Greece, Israel, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States.

The Vakhtangov Theatre performances were held as part of the Bolshie Gastrolis project established by the Russian Ministry of Culture Federal Centre for Support of Touring Activities. The theatre has been a regular participant since 2014, presenting performances in Abakan, Astrakhan, Baku, Essentuki, Khabarovsk, Kislovodsk, Komсомolsk-on-Amur, Omsk, Petrozavodsk, Saratov, Tara, Tbilisi, Ufa, Ulan-Ude, Vladikavkaz and Vladivostok.

Alan Buribayev presents Letters from Italy



Photo credit: The press service of Astana Opera House.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Astana Opera principal conductor Alan Buribayev presented Letters from Italy opera and symphony concert Jan. 6 in the capital. The concert is based on the stories of famous composers through their correspondence while staying in the European country, reported the theatre’s press service.

The programme featured opera and symphonic works created by Russian and European composers performed by Astana Opera soloists including Saltanat Akhmetova, Medet Chotabayev and Alfiya Karimova and the symphony orchestra.

Buribayev devised the idea while studying biographical and historical materials to prepare for his concerts.

“The art of writing letters, and I focus here on the word ‘art,’ is exactly what people really appreciated and treated as an unusually precious skill. In the era before emails and text messages, each letter was like a small work of art with its own canons... At that time, people were very respectful of such a simple thing – writing letters,” he said prior to the concert.

Italy is a country of art and many great artists, composers and writers travelled there for inspiration.

“For example, we can read in Bizet’s letters that in a short time he learned a lot here. Or Tchaikovsky was inspired by the Roman Pinacoteca and the Sistine Chapel and under the influence of these impressions of Italian works, he wrote symphonic and opera masterpieces that have become part of the golden fund of Russian classics,” he added.

Buribayev also wanted to present something warm and joyful to the audience in January, as Italy is known as a sunny country.

He performed the original 1867

French version of Giuseppe Verdi’s opera “Don Carlos,” which is one of his rarely performed ballet scores. The Milanese version of 1884, written in Italian and no longer featuring ballet, has been staged at the Astana Opera. The ballet music was written specifically for the opera’s Paris premiere.

“Today, ‘Don Carlos’ is staged everywhere in different versions, but absolutely everywhere in the world it runs without ballet. I wanted to perform ballet music from the 1867 version, not only to present the rare Verdi, but also because the ballet music itself has its own interesting story, which is associated with a unique and famous jewellery piece, the legendary pearl called La Peregrina (Pilgrim),” he said.

The programme also included Leila’s aria from Georges Bizet’s opera “The Pearl Fishers.”

Buribayev served from 2002-2007 as music director of Germany’s Meiningen Theatre, then from 2006-2011 as chief conductor of the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra in Sweden and Brabant Orchestra in the Netherlands.

In 2011, he worked with Russia’s Bolshoi Theatre on the operas “The Love for Three Oranges” by Sergei Prokofiev, “Eugene Onegin” by Tchaikovsky and “The Magic Flute” by Mozart.

In 2013, he conducted ten performances of “Eugene Onegin” with the Bolshoi Theatre on tour at Tel Aviv Opera and the following year participated in a tour with its orchestra to Austria, Germany and Switzerland. In 2012, he staged “Abai” opera by Latif Khamidi and Akhmet Zhubanov for the first time in Europe at Germany’s Southern Thuringia State Theatre. He was the chief guest conductor of the Japan Century Symphony Orchestra in 2014 and named principal conductor of Astana Opera in March 2015.

Nur-Sultan hosts Museums of Kazakhstan: Global Competitiveness international forum

By Yelena Levkovich

NUR-SULTAN – The international forum, Museums of Kazakhstan: Global Competitiveness, was hosted recently by the Kazakh National Museum and dedicated to its fifth anniversary.

The major theme was demonstrating best practices in developing digital museums and exhibition spaces. The discussion also focused on enhancing contemporary museum management, addressing the problems of preserving museum artefacts and maintaining national and

regional museums. Mukhameduly noted the museum has achieved quite a bit in its first five years.

“We’ve managed to make the museum a sacred place of culture, art and science. Approximately 300 exhibitions were organised throughout the country and internationally. Under the Rukhani Zhangyru (Modernisation of Kazakhstan’s Identity) programme, the Kieli Kazakhstan research centre was created here. In addition, Kazakh National Museum is a scientific centre whose employees regularly take part in global and national archaeological

expeditions. Close cooperation has been established with research centres in Russia, Germany, Korea, Japan and China,” he said.

Professor Myrzatai Zholdasbekov recalled the challenges in establishing the museum due to the lack of specialists.

“I was the board chair, responsible for the first museum’s conception. It was hard to fulfil having very few resources, but we did it being backed by many honoured people and qualified specialists. I am pleased to note the National Museum has become one of the most outstanding historical and

scientific centres of Kazakhstan, employing the best scientists of the country,” he said.

An exhibition titled Treasures of the Kazakh Altai opened as part of the forum. The display features unique gold products of the early Saka culture from the Eleke Sazy barrows, found in the Tarbagatai Region (the East Kazakhstan region) in 2018-2019 by a Samashev-led archaeological expedition. A second exhibit presented scientific reconstruction of the seventh Altyn Adam (Golden Man), an ancient Saka warrior from the Eleke Sazy mound.

‘Cinderella’ premieres at Astana Ballet

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Astana Ballet premiered “Cinderella” Dec. 20-22, a two-act ballet based on the music of Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev.

“Cinderella” is the second fairy tale in the theatre’s repertoire, following “The Nutcracker,” and tickets sold out a month before the programme. The ballet performed the work again Jan. 7-8, then tour to Almaty for Feb. 21-23 performances. Tickets may be purchased on the theatre’s website, <https://astanaballet.com>.

“Starting from the theatre foyer, all the decorations made the atmosphere magical; you could feel it from the first sight. The ballet itself was very impressive; all the characters were represented clearly and their costumes were amazing!” said audience member Leila Mukhtar.

“I particularly loved the character of Cinderella’s stepmother, the artist and, most probably, the director of the production demonstrated her cunning and flirtatious nature so beautifully and hilariously! Together with the fun part, there was also drama, beautiful dancing and amazing Cinderella with the Prince! What I liked the most

was how impressive and abundant were the decorations and special visual effects used in the production. All of them made me feel like I’m watching a Disney movie come to life! I can’t describe it in words; you have to experience all this by yourself!” she continued.

“Cinderella,” staged in the country as a ballet for the first time, is the work of Russian choreographer Nadezhda Kalinina.

“We are creating this show from scratch. Choreography, sets, costumes, video projection – everything is created, made and sewn specifically for Astana Ballet. People want fairy tales and our main task is to create a spectacular family performance with a modern dance style in which there will be many bright characters and, of course, the humour. The genre of comedy in ballet is rare, because being hooligans on stage and making people laugh is much more complicated and requires a certain liberation,” she said.

Although she has previously worked with the ballet, the presentation is her first large-scale production. She staged miniatures and assisted with “Astana,” the first national musical.

“I felt the responsibility when I was invited to stage ‘Cinderella,’ with the most complicated and

amazing music by Sergei Prokofiev. The ballet here is in two acts instead of Prokofiev’s three. It was hard to throw out some pieces of genius music. The ballet takes one and a half hours; the first act is 35 minutes and the second is 55 minutes. Our aim was to create the fairy tale of a kind, poor girl who madly wanted to go to the ball. It was all possible because of our cooperation with and fantasy of Sergei Novikov, the production designer. The scale of decorations is huge; a huge number of people change the decorations during the show,” she added.

The ballet has two sets of soloists – the sisters and the stepmother, and Cinderella and the prince.

“The work was hard; the choreography was hard. One of the complications is that Cinderella almost never leaves the stage. Even during the breaks, the dancers, not only Cinderella, do not relax; they change. Some even change on stage. In addition, we do jumps and rotations and we have to show this emotionally, to show the story, to interest the viewer, make him or her immerse into the fairy tale,” said one of the Cinderella ballerinas Diana Ten.

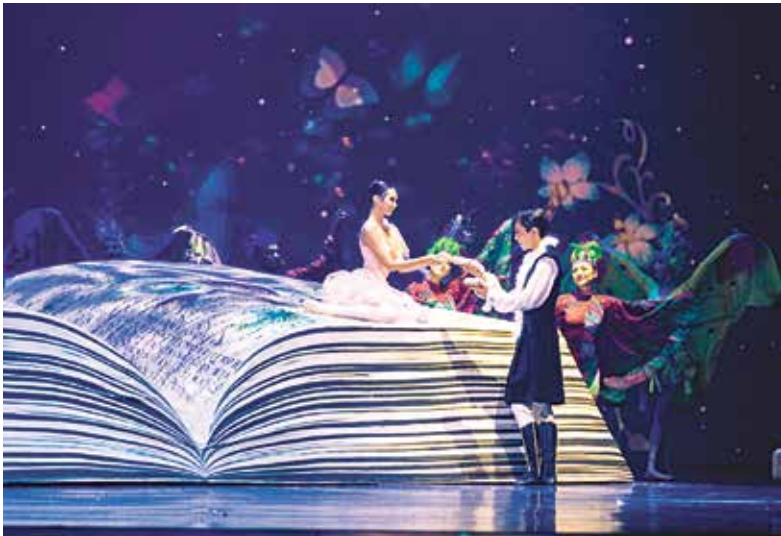


Photo credit: Astana Ballet press service.

Nazerke Aimukhametova and Sundet Sultanov as Cinderella and the Prince.

“Starting with the first rehearsal, my task was to help, to overlook if someone missed something or did not do something. We will try to show all the magic to the audience. The artists started at 10 a.m. and the work could go until three or five in the morning,” added Prince dancer Kazbek Akhmediyarov, who is also assisting in the staging process.

The orchestra is under the direction of Arman Urazgaliyev.

“A live orchestra in performances gives a different feeling, impression. The musicians’ energy is transmitted to the stage. The dancers charge on this energy and thus perform differently, more meaningfully. Performing Prokofiev’s music is incredibly hard because of his style and sheet music. Usually, Prokofiev’s pieces are the most difficult in any theatre repertoire. The musicians were able to work through it, though, but not without problems,” he said.

As set and costume designer, Novikov created the giant books in the background, the garden and costumes for the soloists, guests at the ball, butterflies and ravens and all the other touches. The book showing that it is all a fairy tale is also reflected in the smaller details, props and costumes.

“The idea is simple. There

once was a girl who wrote in her diary. The diary grew to become a giant book full of fantasies,” he added.

The performance uses soft and hard decorations, details and small props, noted decoration department head Zhandos Omarov. “Cinderella” is the largest and the most complex performance in the theatre’s repertoire, requiring maximum technical capabilities.

“I hope that the fairy tale will leave the biggest impression on the audience and create the New Year atmosphere. It was a big project; we have been working on it for more than six months,” said theatre director Alexander Sovostianov.

Kalinina is impressed with the changes to the theatre.

“The theatre is remarkable. I was here in the beginning and the metamorphosis that has happened since 2012 – I am exhilarated. When I was here, there were only female dancers and the fact that it acquired male dancers gave big opportunities for productions. The building, the technical capabilities grew tenfold; I can only imagine what will happen in the future. With the pace that it is developing, I think in five years or so Astana Ballet will become a leading theatre,” she said.

Kazakhstan exempts micro and small businesses from taxes for three years

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed a law exempting micro and small businesses from taxes for three years Dec. 28.

The law, “On introducing amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on improving the procedures for rehabilitation and bankruptcy, budget, tax legislation and legislation on railway transport,” frees certain taxpayers of their tax burdens starting Jan. 1 until Jan. 1, 2023.

According to the Kazakh Ministry of National Economy, the exemption targets micro and small businesses. More than 1.2 million micro and small business entities will be eligible for income tax exemption, allowing the businesses to save over 380 billion tenge (US\$1 billion) in three years and channel those funds instead into business development.

Income tax includes corporate income tax for legal entities, individual income tax for individual entrepreneurs, unified land tax for farms and social tax for entrepreneurs operating on special tax regimes. All other taxes and fees, such as pensions and medical insurance, remain.

The tax exemption applies only to micro and small businesses that

use special tax regimes such as simplified declaration.

The new law defines micro business as individual entrepreneurs with no more than 15 employees and with annual incomes up to 30,000 Monthly Calculation Indices (MCIs), which amounts to 79.5 million tenge (US\$210,000). Small businesses are defined as individual entrepreneurs and legal entities with up to 100 employees and an annual income up to 300,000 MCIs, which is 795 million tenge (US\$2.1 million).

Not all businesses can take advantage of the change, as certain fields are excluded. They include production and wholesale of excisable products, auditing, professional work in the stocks and bonds market, credit bureaus, security, foreign economic activity, banking or certain types of banking operations and activities in the insurance market (except for insurance agents). Grain storage at grain receiving points; coal, oil and other mineral sales; subsoil use; retail gasoline; and diesel fuel and fuel oil sales are on the list of excluded types of activities as well. It also includes activities related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances turnover, lotteries, gambling, activities related to circulating radioactive material, and activities related to circulating military and civilian weapons and their ammunition.

Almaty institute develops plan to modernise thermal electric station

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Experts from the Almaty-based KazNPIEner-goprom Institute are developing a feasibility study to gasify the Almaty energy complex and modernise Thermal Electric Station number 2 with minimised environmental effect, reported the city akimat (administration) press service.

Preliminary project results will be available in March. Several options are under consideration including transit to gas, using gas

treatment facilities and constructing a new station. The main goal is to reduce the pollutant concentration in flue gases to European Union (EU) standards.

Environment issues are among the most pressing for Almaty residents. As fossil fuel plants cause one-quarter of emissions, one solution to reduce pollutants is to transfer from coal to gas.

“It is important for us today to decide on modernisation issues; then, we will discuss these issues in cooperation with experts and the public to come to a balanced deci-

sion that suits all parties. We will focus on the environment,” said Almaty Akim (Mayor) Bakytzhan Sagintayev during the meeting with Samruk Energy management and public figures.

City Public Council members Beknur Kisikov and Sergey Pon-amarev and other public figures suggested the proposed version of the project be reviewed by an independent auditor.

Earlier, Sagintayev noted thermal power plants cause 27 percent of emissions; cars, 60-64 percent.

“It is too expensive to build a

new thermal power station or just change the design. Some investors suggested installing filters and other solutions. We are open to any suggestions and proposals. We are ready to work together with the Samruk Energy company to develop some specific proposals,” he said at a Nov. 29 press conference.

The city administration also plans to plant one million trees within three years as part of the landscaping programme and expects to create more parks and squares.

Corruption call centre runs round the clock

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The call centre launched by the Kazakh Anti-Corruption Agency, where citizens are asked to dial #1424 to report all cases of corruption, is demonstrating results.

“Call centre 1424 of the anti-corruption service calls on citizens to take an active part in improving the anti-corruption policy, make suggestions and recommendations and promptly report corruption cases. Number 1424 is available from both mobile and landline phones and the call is free,” reported the agency.

The agency is constantly improving the call centre’s goal of increasing the population’s legal

literacy and the effectiveness of preventive measures in combating corruption, as well as providing a timely response.

“Today, the call centre operates around the clock, including at night and on weekends. The centre’s employees give citizens legal advice, as well as immediately transmit reports to the regions of crimes being prepared and committed,” it added.

The call centre is relevant, especially in criminal law environment. The bulk of citizens’ appeals are social in nature, which helps prevent domestic corruption.

“In just the current year, 56 pre-trial investigations were launched on such appeals and 18 have already been sent to court,” said the agency.

One result is a director of the Almaty secondary school No. 98, who in September was fined 1.3 million tenge (US\$3,300) and deprived of the right to hold civil service positions for life for receiving a 50,000 tenge (US\$130) bribe for transferring a student.

On Nov. 2, Almaty District Court No. 2 fined Almaty Department of State Architecture and Construction Control Chief Specialist B. Bolatayev nine million tenge (US\$23,500) and deprived him of the right to hold civil service positions for life for an attempt to receive a 400,000 tenge (US\$1,000) bribe.

Atyrau Court No. 2 convicted Administrative Police Department Senior Inspector D. Kalbayev Dec. 19 for receiving

a 40,000 tenge (US\$100) bribe from a citizen for not bringing the man to administrative responsibility. The officer received a 1.2 million tenge (US\$3,100) fine and was deprived of the right to occupy civil service positions and special ranks for life.

Investigations in criminal cases in Turkestan Region are ongoing. A Zhetisai district secondary school director is suspected of receiving a 100,000 tenge (US\$260) bribe from a citizen to be employed as an English teacher. A Sairam District Akimat (government administration) Department of Employment and Social Programmes chief specialist is also under investigation for receiving a bribe to transfer benefits to large families.

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

Kazakhstan to increase social sector support in 2020

By Assel Satubaldina

NUR-SULTAN – The government hosted a press conference Dec. 25 to share the country’s plans for next year, including increasing support for entrepreneurs and the social sector, reported the prime minister’s press service. Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev, Minister of Healthcare Yelzhan Birtanov and Minister of Labour and Social Protection Birzhan Nurymbetov were in attendance.

The government has attended more than 500 meetings with citizens nationwide, including in remote areas, at the instruction of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, said Saparbayev. Citizens made 70 suggestions and the ministers responded to 2,500 questions.

He noted the country’s growing social sector expenditures.

“In general, it is increasing every year. For example, in 2018, it was 43 percent [of the budget]; in 2019 – 45 percent and in 2020 – 50 percent. This shows that the course of policies is towards social sectors that are improving the welfare of our people,” he said.

Saparbayev also reaffirmed the nation’s plans for a 25-percent pay raise for 500,000 teachers, 30-percent pay raise for 215,000 doctors and 20-percent pay raise for 215,000 nurses. The 34,000 citizens working in culture, arts and archives and 25,000 social workers will see 30-percent salary increases.



Kazakh Deputy Minister Berdibek Saparbayev (C), Minister of Labour and Social Protection Birzhan Nurymbetov (R).

Kazakhstan also plans to index 2.2 million pensions by 7 percent and state allowances by 5 percent and increase allowances by at least 30 percent for the 132,000 citizens receiving three types of allowances from the National Insurance Fund.

The Enbek state programme reached 623,000 citizens with measures to promote employment and entrepreneurship, including 416,000 who gained jobs and 131,000 who received training. The nation allocated 176 billion tenge (US\$462.4 million) to provide 46,000 grants and microloans and relocate 9,000 people from the overpopulated south of the country to the north.

Enbek, in place since 2017, will undergo several changes in 2020. New programmes, such as First Job and The Contract of Generations, will allow employers to submit applications for short-term professional staff training.

The government will ease loan requirements for large and low-income families in an effort to stimulate their entrepreneurial activity. The interest rate will be reduced from 6 percent to 4 percent and the term increased to seven years from the current five years.

People with disabilities will receive additional support, said Nurymbetov.

“There are currently 690,000 people with disabilities, of whom

424,000 are of working age, and of the 224,000 who can work, 106,000 work. We set ourselves the task to take measures to increase their economic activity. One of the problems is that people with disabilities are not hired. We have the legislation which says that local executive bodies can set a quota for enterprises (to hire people with disabilities), which is now from 2 percent to 4 percent. The quota has 14,500 units, but it is not fulfilled,” he noted.

The government will allocate 400 billion tenge (US\$1.05 million) to pay allowances and ensure technical rehabilitation services. A recently adopted national plan through 2025 will ensure their

rights and improve their quality of life.

“Different countries have different approaches. For example, in Canada, if a company does not comply with the quota, it is not allowed (to receive) public procurement. There is another experience, in Germany and Japan, when the government says either fulfil the quota, hire a person with a disability or pay compensation,” he added.

Rehabilitation centre construction will begin in 2020 in Almaty, Kokshetau and the capital. The government is considering developing a chain of centres as part of a public private partnership (PPP) with the national insurance fund.

An online social services portal, where people with disabilities can select their rehabilitation means and services, is currently operating in pilot mode. Additional measures include the approved list of diseases enabling a person to receive a disability document for five years, comprehensive assistance roadmap for children with disabilities and measures to strengthen monitoring employers’ compliance with the quota to employ persons with disabilities.

The recent ministerial/Prosecutor’s Office inspection of 95 companies employing more than 30 foreign workers each revealed in excess of 1,000 violations of the Labour and Migration Code, including more than 500 cases of disproportional salaries. A 100-million tenge (US\$262,728) investigation of 400 administrative

cases was opened, nearly 700 work permits were withdrawn and 500 foreign workers were deported.

Next year, the government plans to reduce the quota for hiring foreign workers from 49,000 to 29,000, strengthen employers’ administrative responsibility and ensure regular inspections at companies employing more than 30 foreign workers. The measures will add to the country’s gradual effort to replace foreign workers with local specialists.

Birtanov also spoke about the recently adopted State Healthcare Development Programme for 2020-2025. The introduction of a mandatory social insurance system as of Jan. 1, 2020, will increase spending for one person by 57.5 percent, from 55,000 tenge (US\$144.50) to 87,000 tenge (US\$228.50). It will also enhance the medical infrastructure and increase the level of medical equipment by 70 percent.

Employers contributed nearly 275 billion tenge (US\$722.5 million) to the system in the first 11 months of 2019. The ministry expects annual contributions of at least 500 billion-700 billion tenge (US\$1.3 billion-\$1.84 billion) once the system becomes effective Jan.1.

The government is seeking to develop a PPP mechanism and attract private investments to 127 projects worth 59 billion tenge (US\$155 million) and seven large projects worth 440 billion tenge (US\$1.1 billion).

Amendments to Almaty special status law give more autonomy to local government

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Changes to the Almaty special status law in areas including architecture, city planning, land use, environmental regulation, entrepreneurship, communal property management and transport were made recently, Almaty Deputy Akim (Mayor) Mukhit Azirbayev announced at a press conference.

“To ensure the development processes of social, transport and other infrastructure in urban development of suburban areas, the city has expanded the powers to coordinate and implement urban planning of suburban areas. In order to preserve and protect the green fund of the southern capital, functions are provided for the development and approval of their own rules for the maintenance and protection of green spaces, which will include norms for compensatory planting, rejuvenation, sanitary pruning of green spaces, as well as the development of instructions on technologies and green care work plantings,” said Azirbayev, according to tengrains.kz.

The law now allows the akimat (administration) to increase parking fees in busy areas of the city. Other changes will allow deputies of the maslikhat (local assembly) to approve the design code of Almaty, the tariff policy for rail transport, urban development plans for the city and urban planning regulations without confirmation elsewhere.

Environmental policy changes include allowing the local government set its own rules regarding maintaining and planting greenery, reports zakon.kz. Also, special conditions will be provided to stimulate the development of the green economy. Particularly, using water resources, waste and air pollution payment will be implemented, as well as lowering the payments for companies that implement new technologies that decrease waste and pollution.

Other changes to the law affect transport, employment policy and medical services.

“Along with the core competencies, the law also provides for development opportunities in matters of transport, employment policy, improving the quality of medical services, which will accordingly



Mukhit Azirbayev

also be aimed at developing the city, creating a high-quality urban environment, improving living conditions for citizens, developing business,” said Azirbayev.

“First of all, from my point of view, the law really does reflect the needs of the city, citizens, effective urban governance,” said Yerlan Smailov, member of the Board of Trustees of the Urban Forum Kazakhstan and a member of the Public Council of Almaty.

The success of the changes will depend on their successful application by the akimat and the maintenance of an equal dialogue with the city community.

Smailov discussed his work on the working group on rules for green spaces, which came up with rules reflecting Almaty’s interests that turned out not to comply with national urban regulations established by the relevant ministry. The new amendments to the law will help to solve the problem of uniform rules that are not suitable for all cities.

“My second thesis is that, of course, it’s right that the law was amended, as the law had a limited framework. It was out-dated because the city is developing very fast economically, socially, culturally. Changes in approaches to environmental planning

emerge – both residents want more, and urban communities want more, and the city administration wants to do more. Therefore, the new law helps to achieve the goals of building a quality city,” said Smailov.

Not all recommendations are reflected in the amendments, but there is the possibility of further changes in the practice of applying the law.

“The legislative process is a complex process. Not all proposals are reflected in the law; there are some restrictions on the part of national legislation and mechanisms that complicate decision-making. You need to understand that in a unitary state everything will not be solved in one law. But at the same time, there is an opportunity to observe the practice after a while and initiate subsequent changes,” said Smailov.

The success of the changes will depend on their successful application by the akimat and the maintenance of an equal dialogue with the city community.

“The law in itself is an instrument, and a lot here depends not only on the existence of the law, but also on how efficiently the city administration, the akimat of the city, and the city administration will work... Efficiency in decision-making of everything related to the city – transport, planning, culture, urbanism, the social sphere, social infrastructure, ecology – can be achieved only in dialogue with city communities, activists, NGOs, experts. It is very important to study the opinions of citizens... The key to success is an equal dialogue.”

Country makes healthcare, payment and salary changes to social sector for 2020

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan’s list of social changes for 2020 include implementing a mandatory health insurance system, new social payments, salary increases, restrictions on loans for low income citizens and decreased foreign worker quota.

The compulsory social health insurance system took effect Jan. 1. Employers will now deduct 1 percent of accrued income from each employee’s salary and transfer it to the Health Insurance Fund. At the same time, employers will continue to make 2-percent deductions for hired personnel in 2020-2021. The payments will entitle Kazakhs to a medical services insurance package that is more comprehensive than the former complimen-

tary one. Those not covered by insurance will be able to visit a local therapist, take a minimum of tests, be examined and treat a number of diseases deemed life-threatening. All emergency medical care will remain free.

Families with four or more minor children or full-time students under the age of 23 started receiving social payments starting Jan. 1. The allowance will be assigned in differentiated amounts regardless of family income: four children – 42,496 tenge (US\$111); five children – 53,127 tenge (US\$139); six children – 63,757 tenge (US\$167) and seven or more children – 74,388 tenge (US\$194).

Salary increases cover teachers (25 percent), culture industry workers (35-50 percent) and social services employees (30-60 percent). Beginning Jan. 1, an addi-

tional payment has been introduced for psycho-emotional and physical stress on employees of organisations providing special social services in hospitals, semi-hospitals, home care and temporary stay facilities.

A ban was established on issuing loans to citizens with incomes below the subsistence level. Banks will be prohibited from charging commissions for late payments on loans for more than three months, or 90 days.

Starting Jan. 1, the quota for attracting foreign labour has been reduced from approximately 49,000 in 2019 to 29,000 in 2020. All enterprises with more than 250 on staff and which hire in excess of 30 foreign workers will receive regular inspections, with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection monitoring possible violations.



Lonely Planet names Central Asia 2020’s best travel region

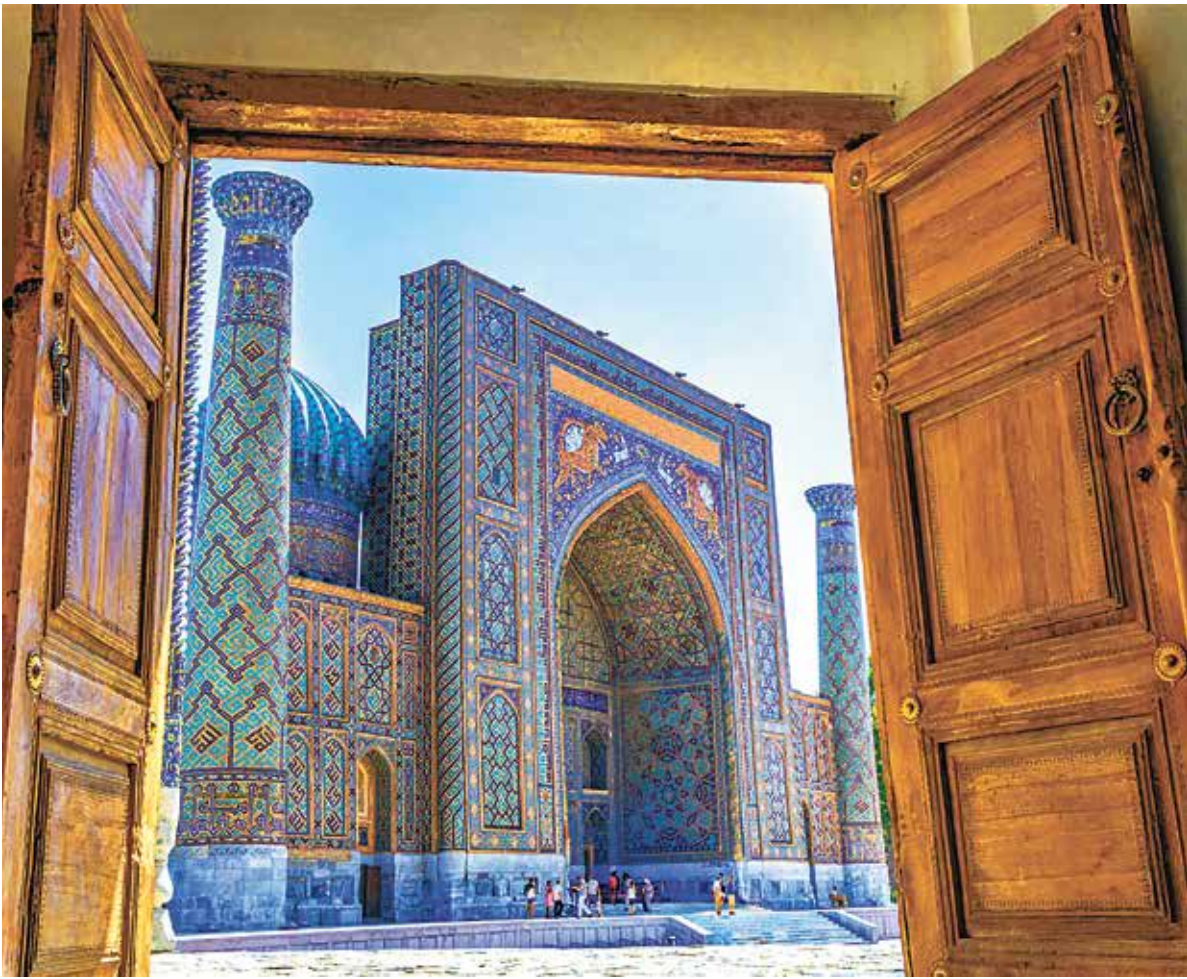
By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Lonely Planet, the Australian-based travel guide, has chosen Central Asia as best travel region in 2020. The online service ranked the area at the top as it has become more open and accessible.

“A region once made rich by trade and travellers, the Central Asian Silk Road is again at the centre of global interest. The ancient cities, bustling bazaars and wild landscapes of Central Asia are drawing increasing numbers of visitors looking for adventure along one of history’s most storied travel routes,” according to its website.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have granted travellers from many countries either visa-free access or e-visas. To date, Kazakhstan offers a visa-free regime for 57 countries. Central Asia is also considering creating a regional Silk Road visa.

Uzbekistan has played a big role in the increased tourist attraction. Since 2016, the country has instituted a number of reforms creating an open economy. Uzbekistan offers a visa-free regime for citizens



The Registan Square, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Photo credit: lonelyplanet.com.

of nearly 90 countries and has introduced affordable electronic visas for others.

The online service stresses the beauty of Bukhara, Samarkand and the Pamir Mountain ranges.

“In addition to the Uzbek cities of the Silk Road, mass tourism has not yet managed to penetrate into Central Asia, which gives each trip a genuine sense of discovery. Add to this the inner charm of a forgotten region, slowly turning into a geopolitical reference point, and you will get one of the most exciting hidden corners of Asia,” writes Lonely Planet.

The region has also greatly improved transportation and infrastructure as part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

The architecture of the Kazakh capital is fifth among the region’s top attractions.

“Kazakhstan’s custom-built capital rises from the steppe like a mirage to reveal some of Asia’s most audacious and cutting-edge modern architecture,” the website notes.

It suggests visiting Khan Shatyr shopping mall, the world’s largest tent designed by Norman Foster, and the Palace of Peace and Harmony’s glass pyramid building.

“Nur-Sultan is the symbolic brainchild of President Nazarbayev and the face of post-Borat Kazakhstan. The constantly evolving city got a huge boost from the 2017 World Expo and an emerging restaurant scene makes visiting the city a pleasure, not just a curiosity,” adds the description.

Turkestan’s Khoja Akhmet Yasauli Mausoleum, “a beautiful building and a rare architectural gem,” is also included among the top destinations.

“It’s also one of the best places to get a sense of Central Asian Sufism and meet local pilgrims as they pray, picnic and tie wishes to trees surrounding the holy shrine. For the most atmospheric approach, get here on an overnight train from Almaty or Tashkent,” suggests Lonely Planet.

The additional top ten tourist regions are Le Marche (Italy, second place), Tōhoku (Japan, third), Maine (the United States, fourth), Lord Howe Island (Australia, fifth), Guizhou (China, sixth), Bahia de Cádiz (Spain, seventh), Northeast Argentina (eighth), Kvarner Bay (Croatia, ninth) and Brazilian Amazon (tenth).

Chinese, Indian citizens may transit visa-free for 72 hours in six airports

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Starting Jan. 1, Chinese and Indian citizens may transit through Kazakhstan for 72 hours without the need to obtain a visa, reported inobusiness.kz Jan. 9.

“There is a 72-hour visa-free regime for entry, stay and departure from the Republic of Kazakhstan for citizens of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of India who transit through the international airports... At checkpoints, stamps will be affixed to the passports of transit citizens of China and India, indicating the time of crossing the state border of Kazakhstan,” said the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development press service.

The Aktau, Karaganda, Shymkent and Taraz airports were added to the existing international airports in Almaty and the capital that are part of the arrangements. The rule will continue through 23:59, Dec. 31, 2020.

“Thus, the citizens of China and India traveling in transit through the airports of Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Shymkent, Aktau, Karaganda and Taraz on Kazakh and for-

eign airlines can use the 72-hour visa-free regime to stay on the territory of the republic,” added the statement.

The rule, which applies to state and private airlines, is clarified in the government decree “On the approval of the rules for the entry and stay of immigrants in Kazakhstan, as well as their departure from Kazakhstan, and the rules for the implementation of migration control, as well as registration of foreigners and stateless persons illegally crossing the state border of the Republic illegally staying in Kazakhstan, and also persons who are prohibited from entering the territory of Kazakhstan.”

According to the latest industry data, passenger transit through Kazakhstan exceeded one million passengers in 2019, representing an 11-percent increase compared to 2018.

Eleven Kazakh airports – Aktau, Almaty, Karaganda, Kokshetau, Nur-Sultan, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, Semey, Shymkent, Taraz and Ust-Kamenogorsk – introduced an open skies regime Nov. 1, reported the press service. The open skies regime allows more foreign carriers and more flights to operate at the airports.

Kazakhstan’s passport ranks 67th for visa-free travel

Continued from Page B1

Singapore is second with 190 points and Germany and South Korea share third place, providing visa-free entrance to 189 nations.

Russia, ranked 51st, is highest among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as its passports provide access to 118 countries. Kazakhstan is second among CIS countries.

The final three spots on the list are given to Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, with 29, 28 and 26 points respectively.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is highlighted as demonstrating one of the rating’s most remarkable advancements. In the last three years, the country has ascended from 62nd to a spot in the top 20. The UAE now holds 18th place with 171 visa-free destinations.

“The Henley Passport Index is the original ranking of all the world’s passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa. The ranking is based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which maintains the world’s largest and most accurate database of travel information, and enhanced by ongoing research by the Henley & Partners research department,” according to henleypassportindex.com.

The index, begun in 2006, has continued to keep track of each country’s passport history and ratings change throughout the year as nations’ visa policies change. Website visitors can see not only the rating, but also the country’s individual ranking history, the list of nations where they have access and a diagram of its passport.

Pavlodar akimat launches guided tour buses

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Pavlodar akimat (administration) launched two and a half hour guided tours Dec. 6 that visit seven locations by bus, reported pavlodarnews.kz.

The project is in pilot mode until Jan. 15, with tours hosted by the region’s history museum employees. Pavlodar State University students would eventually serve as guides to fulfil their credit-bearing internships.

The pilot tour includes stops at the Blagoveschenski Cathedral, with nine bells, the largest weighing 1,024 kilogrammes, imported from Moscow, Russia; Goose flight paleontological site, which was discovered in 1928 and has the remains of more than 60 types of animals from the Miocene and Pliocene eras and Mashkur Jusup Mosque. The final locations are the Pavlodar central embankment, Yertys Mu-

seum and the Chief’s Museum house.

“Anyone can contact the department of entrepreneurship of the city; there is a specialist there and he will include everyone on the list. At 12 p.m. every day until Jan. 15, this bus will run for free in test mode. After the pilot regime, we will determine for ourselves the main stops, work out the route and determine the

cost of the tour taking into account the programme and visiting museums. We are counting on everyone – guests and residents of the city who want to learn something interesting, unique. The main thing is that people have an interest, but in our city, there is something to show,” said Deputy Akim (Mayor) Arystan Kenzhegalinov.

Pavlodar is in the eastern Ka-



Photo credit: pavlodarnews.kz.

zakhstan, where tourism development is underway, regional Tourism and External Affairs Administration head Marat Kabakov told inobusiness.kz. In particular, the region has invited experts from the Asian Development Bank to determine development priorities.

“We are working to attract foreign experts to form a package of recommendations on the development of winter tourism through the Asian Development Bank. Within the framework of this project, we are planning to study international experience in creating a tourism cluster, including effective measures of state support for the industry, with a detailed reflection of the basic principles, approaches and recommendations for use in our field. Also, [we want to complete] an analysis of the current situation, assessment of the uniqueness of natural resources, determination of demand, dynamics and potential for increasing tourist flow, tourism income and so on,” he noted.

Qatar Airways to launch direct flights from Doha to Nur-Sultan and Almaty

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Qatar Airways will launch flights March 30 between Doha and Nur-Sultan. Qatar Airways will also launch from Doha to Almaty April 1, according to inobusiness.kz.

“The opening of the flight will allow Kazakh passengers to travel to 160 destinations of Qatar Air-

ways,” said a representative of the Press Service of the Civil Aviation Committee at the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development on Jan. 13.

Qatar Airways will conduct six regular passenger flights per week in Kazakhstan. The Doha – Almaty flight will operate twice per week, while Doha – Nur-Sultan flight will operate four times per week. The airline will use Airbus 320

aircraft in its regular flights, while Boeing-787 Dreamliner will be used for two inaugural flights. The tickets will be sold starting Jan. 16.

Eleven Kazakh airports of Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Shymkent, Aktau, Karaganda, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Pavlodar, Kokshetau, Taraz, Petropavlovsk and Semey adopted an open skies regime Nov. 1, reported the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development press ser-

vice. The open skies regime allows more foreign carriers and more flights to operate at Kazakh airports.

Qatar Airways, the national airline of Qatar, is one of the largest in the world. The aircraft fleet consists of 233 aircraft. The main transit hub of the airline is Hamad International Airport in Doha. As of the end of 2018, the airline transported about 29 million passengers.

Mandatory registration abolished for tourist visits up to 30 days

By Assel Satubaldina

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan has cancelled mandatory registration for foreign tourists staying in the country up to 30 days, as President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed the law Dec. 30.

Foreign citizens were previously required to register at the migration office within five days of crossing the border. Those staying more than 30 days will need temporary registration.

The law obliges the invitee, including hotels, hostels and individ-

uals, to notify the migration office about the person’s arrival within three working days. Notice is made at vmp.gov.kz, the online visa and migration website operating since 2014, where citizens can submit an electronic notification using an electronic signature. The service is free of charge and requires only 15 minutes.

In 2019, 250 hotels used the service to notify the office of 110,000 foreign citizens.

Kazakh Tourism Chair Yerzhan Yerkinbayev noted the law was a “big win for the development of inbound tourism.”

“When analysing the market, we studied the needs of a tourist and we made a review of all complaints, negative feedback and posts. The previous system envisioned the mandatory registration of foreign citizens, except for several countries, within five days and also envisioned an administrative responsibility in case of a violation of terms of stay, including fines and removal from a flight,” he said.

Tokayev raised the issue of mandatory registration during an Oct. 29 extended meeting in Almaty, where he described the procedure

as a source of corruption. “If we really want to increase the investment and tourism attractiveness of the largest cities and the entire country, we should get rid of such anachronisms as compulsory registration of foreigners at migration offices,” he said at the time.

The government also extended the 72-hour transit visa-free regime for Chinese and Indian citizens until the end of 2020. The regime is applicable to individuals from both countries transiting through airports in Aktau, Almaty, Karaganda, the capital, Shymkent and Taraz.

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

Golovkin ranks among top 10 boxers in world, fights among best of decade

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – U.S. website Business Insider ranked Kazakhstan’s Gennady Golovkin ninth on its list of the 15 best boxers in the world right now. The list was released Dec. 25.

“Before Golovkin turned professional, he was a wildly decorated amateur fighter with a 2003 World Amateur Championships gold medal and a silver at the 2004 Olympic Games. He turned pro two years later, won his first (interim) world title four years after that and quickly developed a reputation because of his punching power,” according to the website.

It also noted Golovkin’s recent win over Ukrainian Sergei Derevyanchenko, where he gained the International Boxing Federation (IBF) and International Boxing Organisation (IBO) middleweight champion titles.

“The only blemishes on Golovkin’s record are a 2017 draw against (Saul) ‘Canelo’ Alvarez, which some say he should have won, and a loss in the rematch,

which he also should have won, according to others,” it added.

Alvarez, of Mexico, is ranked number one in the list, followed by Vasyl Lomachenko and Oleksandr Usyk, both of Ukraine.

Golovkin’s fights were also named among the best. Boxing Writers Association of America, The Ring website and boxingnews24.com named his latest fight with Derevyanchenko one of the best of 2019.

Business Insider ranked the fighters on a pound-for-pound basis, where talent, achievements and quality of victories are more important than weight class.

Earlier this year, Golovkin beat

the record for being a top 10 boxer, reported nur.kz, as he was one of the best boxers in the world for 249 consecutive weeks.

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His second fight with Alvarez was also ranked among the top five of the decade, according to the Dec. 17 edition of British magazine Boxing News. The September 2018 rematch following the 2017 draw was named fourth, with the first between Anthony Joshua (the U.K.) and Wladimir Klitschko (Ukraine).

“Rarely, particularly in the modern era, have two fighters of such obvious quality stood and traded with barely a backward step for 36 minutes. In this rematch of their 2017 draw, Canelo was a revelation, exhibiting supreme upper body movement as he drew mistakes from Golovkin. But GGG was also impressive and at the end of 12 breathless rounds, it could have gone either way,” it wrote.



Photo credit: Shutterstock

Astana Pro Team’s Gorka Izagirre wins three races

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Astana Pro Team rider Gorka Izagirre won the Basque Country Cyclocross Championship Dec. 29, reported prosports.kz. The top finish complimented his two previous wins in the last six weeks.

Izagirre, a native of Spain,

took first place Nov. 24 in the CX Garai Bizkaia Championships in Basque Country, overtaking his younger brother, Ion, by 44 seconds. Jonathan Lastra, from UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale) Professional Continental team Caja Rural-Seguros RGA, came in third.

Astana Pro Team member Omar Freilé finished sixth. Luis Leon

Sanchez was declared for the race, but did not participate.

Izagirre also won the Dec. 2 Abadiñoko Udala Saria in Spain. Ismael Esteban, who finished 25 seconds after the leader, took second and Kevin Suarez, who arrived 19 seconds later, took third.

Izagirre’s most recent win was in his birthplace. The brothers joined Astana Pro Team in 2019 and have

already brought it victories. The Spain championship took place Jan. 10-12.

Astana Pro Team, officially UCI World Team Astana (the term used to name a cycling team of the highest category in professional road cycling) was formed in 2006 after the dissolution of Liberty Seguros-Würth team. Alexandr Vinokurov (known to fans as Vino), a former professional road bicycle racer and currently the team’s general manager, received assistance from First President Nursultan Nazarbayev to create the new team.

Astana Pro Team will enter its 15th season in 2020. In the past 14 seasons, it has achieved 37 wins and is ranked fifth in the world. The team presented its 28 official members for the upcoming season on Dec. 14.

“Today, we are starting our 15th season. We have gone a long way so far and we have achieved many big goals, but I am sure that many great and amazing things are still lying further ahead. We are starting the new season completely ready and highly motivated for something more. I would like to congratulate Astana Pro Team on the very beautiful and successful season we had in 2019 and I’d like to wish the guys to reach even bigger successes in the upcoming year,” said Vinokurov.

Zarina Diyas wins ITF tournament in Hong Kong

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh tennis player Zarina Diyas won the International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournament held in Hong Kong Dec. 30 to Jan. 5, reported prosports.kz. This is her first victory of the 2020 season.

In the final match, Diyas beat Chinese player Zhu Lin, who occupies the 72nd place in the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) ranking. The match ended with a 6:4, 7:5 score, making Diyas the winner of the tournament’s \$25,000 prize. This is the fourth time the two women have faced off, and the third time Diyas has defeated her rival.

To get to the finals, Diyas beat Dasha Lopatetskaya (6:1, 6:2), Zheng Wushuang (6:2, 6:0), Ekaterine Gorgodze (6:0, 77:62) and Sachia Vickery (6:3, 6:2).

This is Diyas’ 10th singles tournament victory – she holds eight ITF titles and one WTA International title from Tokyo in 2017. She has played 23 tournaments overall.

Diyas had been ranked 77th in the WTA rankings, but her new victory will push her higher. Her highest ever WTA ranking was 31st, and this is her third consecutive year ranked among the top 100 players in the world.

She is the third best female tennis player in Kazakhstan, after Yulia Putintseva (34th in the WTA ranking) and Elena Rybakina (37th).

Diyas’ doubles WTA ranking is 452; her highest so far was 89 in 2015. The WTA website estimates her prize money over her entire career amounts to \$2.7 million.



Photo credit: 24.kz

Diyas started her career in 2007 and won her first ITF title in 2008 in Astana. She studies psychology through a remote university programme. Diyas is now playing in the Shenzhen Open Tournament in China, which started Jan. 4. She met Duan Yingying for her first match Jan. 7. Zhu Lin will also participate in this tournament.

The ITF governs global competitive tennis. Founded in 1913, it includes 211 national and six regional associations. WTA is an organising body for women’s professional tennis. It was founded in 1973 to facilitate equality for female tennis players and a better future for women’s tennis overall.

Men’s sitting volleyball team to hold joint training camps

By Nurdana Adylikhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan’s men’s sitting volleyball team participated in a joint training camp Dec. 16-22 in Riga, Latvia. The athletes also plan to participate in training camps in Egypt, Germany and Kazakhstan to prepare for the Tokyo Paralympic Games qualifiers, said national team coach Bauyrzhan Takhauov in an exclusive interview with The Astana Times.

The last men’s Paralympic qualification tournament will be held March 16-21 in Edmond, Oklahoma (U.S.) and the Sitting Volleyball World Cup will take place April 21-28 in China. The athletes need to train quite a bit to prepare for the upcoming world championships, which will determine the final list of participants at the 2020 Summer Paralympics, he noted.

“After coming back from Egypt in February, we will go to the qualification tournament in America... About 12-14 teams will partici-

pate there. We are preparing for it now,” he said.

“In April, there will be the World Cup in China. We are also preparing for that tournament. After these two competitions, it will be decided whether we will go to Tokyo or not,” he added.

Five games were held during the cup, where four teams competed for the prize in the finale. The Kazakh teams received first and second place medals, with the Lithuanians taking third.

Preceding the training camp in Riga, Kazakh athletes participated Dec. 13-15 in the Friendly Cup 2019 international tournament in Līvāni, Latvia. Seven teams from Latvia, three from Lithuania, two

from Kazakhstan and the Vektor team from Moscow, Russia were among the participants.

Five games were held during the cup, where four teams competed for the prize in the finale. The Kazakh teams received first and second place medals, with the Lithuanians taking third.

“Latvians are very friendly and hospitable people. The hotel, sauna and other facilities were great; they (the organisers) created all the conditions for us,” said Takhauov.

The rules for classic and sitting volleyball are nearly identical, with the only differences in the height of the net and the size of the court. For men’s sitting volleyball, the net height is 1.15 metres (rather than 2.43 metres) and the court is smaller.

In January, the team will have 10-day joint trainings in Germany, then continue training at its site in the capital.

The International Paralympic Committee will make the decision on the final list of Tokyo participants after the world championship results are announced.



Photo credit: National Paralympic Committee of Kazakhstan

Healthcare Minister inspects compulsory social health insurance implementation

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Minister of Healthcare Yelzhan Birtanov and Health Insurance Fund Chair Aibatyr Zhumagulov recently assessed the work of Nur-Sultan’s hospitals and their practical implementation of the new compulsory social health insurance system.

Among medical institutions the minister visited were the Central Railway Hospital, Perinatal Centre No. 3, the Dermatovenerologic Dispensary and City Polyclinic No. 2. The minister evaluated the work and the integration of medical information systems and noted the classification of patients by insurance status and the registration of citizens who have not yet become participants of the health insurance system.



Yelzhan Birtanov (L) inspects one of the medical facilities.

Birtanov said all technical gaps in the compulsory social health insurance system should be ad-

ressed in favour of the patient and the population should feel an improvement in the quality of medi-

cal care after the implementation of the system.

According to specialists at City Polyclinic No. 2, approximately 440 people visit the clinic daily and more than 60 percent of them have insurance.

Birtanov said at least 80 percent of population should be insured, according to the ministry’s estimates. He added children, pensioners, disabled people, pregnant women and students are included in 15 privileged categories for which the government makes contributions to the Health Insurance Fund.

The minister also added the compulsory social health insurance system increased funding for rehabilitation assistance by 12 times, and it is expected that more people will now use such services.

The rehabilitation department of

the City Polyclinic No. 2 launched in January 2020. It provides social, psychological and medical support for disabled people, a new type of service in Kazakhstan. Both adults and children can receive the treatment in the hospital.

Since July 2019, a rehabilitation department has operated in the clinic for children with central nervous system disease, delayed psychospeech development, Down syndrome and autism. According to the head physician of the clinic, the centre was opened first among all medical organisations.

The minister also visited the Central Railway Hospital, which has completed repairs of two buildings for the relocation of hospital departments. Birtanov noted the expanded emergency room area and the optimisation of unnecessary rooms. He also instructed the

hospital administration to smooth the flow of patients and finish the repair of the surgical building.

From Jan. 1, Kazakhstan began providing medical care in two packages – a new model of the guaranteed volume of free medical care and a package of compulsory social health insurance. Emergency and primary health care including basic diagnostic services remain free for all citizens, oral-mans (ethnic Kazakhs who have immigrated to Kazakhstan since independence) and residents of the country. Consultative and diagnostic assistance and treatment in day hospitals and round-the-clock hospitals is provided free of charge only to insured citizens and patients with major chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, arterial hypertension, cancer, tuberculosis and hepatitis.

Administration accepts applications for targeted social assistance

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The Nur-Sultan city administration is accepting applications for targeted social assistance at the city’s family support institute, its employment centre and four district administration offices. People can get more information at the Yessil District akimat, reports Elorda. info.

Starting in January, targeted social assistance in the new format will be assigned quarterly. The assistance is intended to bridge the gap between per capita income and the national poverty line.

“The poverty line today is set at 24,258 tenge (US\$63). Previously, a guaranteed payment of the poverty line for children was assigned and the difference between per capita income and poverty line was assigned to parents,” said head of the assignment of benefits department of the Yessil district Samal Akhmetova.

Targeted social assistance is provided as conditional or unconditional cash assistance. Conditional cash assistance is provided for families that include a working-age family member. This family member should be ready for further employment.

“Upon refusal of employment, within six months, targeted social assistance will be terminated for all family members. Social assistance is not provided for families who have provided false information within six months from the date of provision,” she added.

Approximately 30 to 40 people visit specialists per day at the Yessil District administration.

Benefits are not provided for families who have more than one home registered or who have a car, excluding families with children with disabilities.

Potential recipients should apply using an identity card. All necessary information will be requested from the information systems of government agencies. A written request will be sent to the relevant state agency in the absence of information.

All applications are being accepted in the new format. All pay-

ments that were made before December 31, 2019, are suspended. Family income will be calculated based on the previous one, which is the fourth quarter of 2019.

Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev called for more research into new approaches to social assistance.

“It is necessary to explain the rules on the appointment of social assistance and benefits for large families and to create favourable conditions. If people have additional questions, it is necessary to attract specialists from other state bodies and solve these issues immediately,” Saparbayev said during his visit to the Yessil District akimat Jan. 5.

This year, a guaranteed social package has been introduced for children from one to six years old and from six to 18 years old. Children from low-income families will be provided with school uniforms, school supplies and one-time hot meals at school. The social package for children also provides a 50 percent reimbursement of public transport travel costs. Guaranteed social assistance for each child per month is 4,710 tenge (US\$12); assistance for hygiene products for each child from one to six years old is 1,774 tenge (US\$4) quarterly.

Starting in January, targeted social assistance in the new format will be assigned quarterly. The assistance is intended to bridge the gap between per capita income and the national poverty line.

Families with four or more children will receive benefits regardless of their income. These benefits vary by the number of children and range from 42,500 tenge to 73,000 tenge (US\$111-191).



Nur-Sultan ambulance to have modern emergency vehicles, more effective contact centres

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov and Healthcare Minister Yelzhan Birtanov reviewed the Capital Ambulance Station’s working conditions during a Dec. 25 business visit to the facility. The service will more than double the number of emergency cars by the New Year and enhance its contact centres with iKOMEK112 dispatch service.

The station will increase the number of its emergency vehicles from 64 to 138. Fifty-two additional vehicles currently circulate within the city and 22 more joined after Jan. 1.



Photo credit: Nur-Sultan akimat press service.

“Increasing the number of vehicles by half allows us to unload calls, reduce the time of arrival of the ambulance to 10 minutes and increase the number of teams to 20,” said Kulginov, reported the akimat (city administration) press service.

The majority of the new cars are reanimobles that provide intensive care and in-car monitoring while transporting patients. The vehicles are equipped with defibrillators, a complete heart rate monitoring system, modern lung ventilation apparatus, oxygen cylinder and heart-lung machine, said capital Akimat Emergency Ambulance Director Murat Orazbayev, reported the press service.

“In order to improve the quality of medical care and create working conditions, we carried out large and important work,” he noted.

A single mobile application, which all medical institution heads were required to install in October, has reduced processing time from five-six days to one-two days.

“Together with the healthcare department and the iKomek109 contact centre, we analysed the work of state medical institutions and identified four systematic problems. These were problems with making an appointment with a doctor, queues in clinics, unethical behaviour of medical workers and there were also problems of incompetence,” he added.

Polyclinics No. 2, 6 and 9 introduced an electronic queue at the request of patients, which the akimat plans to integrate into all medical facilities by the New Year. It is also planning to construct a new medical facility in the Saryarka district next year through a public private partnership.

As part of the national digitisation project, the iKOMEK Support Centre launched the pilot iKOMEK112 Unified Call and Dispatch Service in April. The service was introduced to reduce false, inquiry, repeat and other non-important calls to emergency dispatch services. The “by mistake” calls comprise 81 percent of all contacts to emergency services 101, 102 and 103.

“iKOMEK112 ensures coordinated interaction of all emergency services, reducing the time for joint incident response, etc.,” said Kulginov.

The akimat is working to ensure 20-minute accessibility for primary health care rooms.

“Doctor at Home facilities have been opened on the ground floors of new residential complexes; in addition to police strongpoints, children’s centres, rehabilitation centres and clinics are also provided. This year, 700 station employees underwent training on international standards of resuscitation and safe driving,” he added.

City adds electric buses to public transportation fleet

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Fifteen additional electric buses began making the rounds in Kazakhstan’s capital with the start of the New Year. Nur-Sultan Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov checked the technical condition and features of the new buses Jan. 2.

The buses produce zero amount of harmful emissions into the atmosphere. Their maintenance will also be cheaper than those ones running on diesel fuel.

“Electric buses are also fundamentally different in maintenance. There is no gearbox, you will not need to change oils, liquids. Savings in operating costs will be up to 80 percent. If diesel costs per day are up to 22,000 to 25,000 tenge (\$57.50 to \$65.30), then electric costs are four to five times less. The design itself allows you to charge the bus only once a day at night... during the day there is no need to charge the bus, there is enough electricity for the whole day,” Astana LRT Deputy Board Chair Baurzhan Seitov said, the Nur-Sultan akimat (city administration) press service reported.

The new buses are equipped with an intelligent surveillance system, ramps and special places for people with disabilities and passengers with children. The buses have USB ports near the seats

to recharge mobile phones. The new electric buses should also significantly reduce the interval and waiting time for buses at stops.

In February 2019, the city fleet tested a domestically made electric bus during the lowest winter temperatures of -38 degrees Celsius.

The akimat purchased 100 electric buses from a joint venture between China’s Yutong and Kazakhstan’s SaryarkaAvtoProm company. By the end of the spring,

all of them will be operating in the capital.

SaryarkaAvtoProm manufactures 27 to 32 percent of each bus, including the electric motor, suspension parts and interior parts. The plant assembles one Yutong ZK612BEVG bus for 146.71 million tenge (\$383,137).

The Nur-Sultan akimat also considered buying GX 337 electric buses from France’s Heuliez Bus GX 337 Electric buses (they start

from \$503,000 per bus), Lion’s City E buses from Germany’s MAN Truck Lion’s City E bus (\$635,000) and German Mercedes eCitaro buses from Mercedes (\$558,000).

The akimat purchased its buses through DBK Leasing as part of a state programme to upgrade the fleet with domestically produced equipment. The seven-year lease has an interest rate of 7 percent per year.



Electric buses in Nur-Sultan.

Photo credit: Astana Akimat press service.