

President promotes stronger economic ties on visit to UAE



Photo credit: akorda.kz

L-R: Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed.

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan discussed bilateral relations and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates during President Tokayev’s Jan. 27-28 first presidential visit to Abu Dhabi.

Both leaders acknowledged the positive state of relations and a desire to continue them.

“At present, bilateral relations between our countries are developing at a high level. The UAE gives particular importance to strengthening cooperation with Kazakhstan. The cooperation between our countries covers a wide range of directions,” Al Nahyan said, reported akorda.kz.

“The history of relations between the two countries has deep roots. We are connected by true friendship, mutual understanding and trust. Therefore, our relationship has great prospects. The main purpose of my visit is to give a new impetus to the cooperation of the two states. We have achieved great success, but we must not stand still, we must move forward. I attach particular importance to this visit and have high hopes for it,” Tokayev said.

The leaders discussed cooperation in the petrochemicals, agriculture, transport and logistics, financial and investment sectors.

“Our trade and economic relations and cultural and humanitarian cooperation are actively developing. Entrepreneurs of our countries also actively cooperate. To date, about 350 joint ventures have been created. For example,

[there’s] the Abu Dhabi Plaza complex under construction in the city of Nur-Sultan,” said Tokayev.

The meeting ended with exchanges of signed documents. The Kazakh Ministry of Energy and UAE Ministry of Energy and Industry inked a memorandum of understanding and cooperation in the petrochemical industry. The Kazakh Ministry of Trade and the Emirati Ministry of Economy signed a memorandum of understanding. The Astana International Financial Centre’s (AIFC’s) Committee on financial regulation services and the Emirati Central Bank also signed memorandum of understanding.

Tokayev also stressed that both countries have an important historical frontier in 2021. Kazakhstan will celebrate the 30 years of its independence, while the Emirates will prepare festivities for its 50th anniversary.

Tokayev was also expected to meet during the trip with Emirati Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

On the first day of the visit, Tokayev also toured the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and met with the Emirati business community.

“We have an ambitious plan to implement joint investment projects worth \$11 billion,” the President said at a meeting with the business community. “At present, we are negotiating with the investment company Mubadala on the implementation of a project worth \$6.6 billion for the construction of a petrochemical complex for the production of polypropylene in Atyrau Region.”

“Our joint project can be a good example of the fact that Kazakhstan’s economy pays great attention to the processing industry and industrial development,” he added.

“The AIFC will become the venue for the IPO (initial public offering) of our largest state strategic assets, such as the national oil and gas company, railways, telecommunications companies, etc. We invite both corporations and welfare funds, such as the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and Mubadala, to participate in the privatisation programme,” Tokayev said.

According to him, investment proposals worth nearly \$40 billion have been developed in the mining industry, metallurgy, petrochemicals, agriculture, logistics, tourism and other industries.

From January to November 2019, mutual trade turnover increased 10.3 percent year-on-year and totalled \$500 million, the President said. The direct investments from the UAE to Kazakhstan reached \$2.1 billion, while investments from Kazakhstan to the UAE reached \$1 billion.

Digital Kazakhstan programme created 8,000 jobs in 2019

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Digital Kazakhstan programme helped create 8,000 jobs last year, with the programme’s total economic effect exceeding 600 billion tenge (US\$1.58 billion) for 2018 and 2019. The digital technologies brought noticeable improvements in the public services, education, healthcare, financial, transport, mining and metallurgical sectors.

“Digitisation can become an engine of the national economy and a generator of permanent jobs,” said a statement from the prime minister’s press service.

The programme has digitised 80.2 percent of public services

and more than 9.8 million services were provided in 2019 in the social labour sphere. The digital projects saved employers and job seekers 862.2 million tenge (US\$2.27 million).

Digitising public services has reduced paperwork by 70.8 million documents and provided an indirect economic effect of more than 8.4 billion tenge (US\$22.16 million).

The vast majority of the country’s 18.6 million population have regional electronic health passports. In hospitals, 97.5 percent of healthcare organisations are equipped with computers and connected to the Internet.

Continued on Page A4

UAE, Kazakhstan have unique cooperation opportunities, says envoy

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have unique opportunities for cooperation, said UAE Ambassador to Kazakhstan Mohamed Ahmed bin Sultan Al Jaber in an exclusive interview with The Astana Times.

Kazakh and UAE diplomatic relations have been growing at a dynamic pace since being established in 1992. The countries continue to build close and trusting relations through mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation.

“Undoubtedly, the dynamics of meetings at the highest level testify to an unprecedented interaction from the perspective of international relations, thanks to which cooperation between Kazakhstan and the UAE is moving forward. For its part, the UAE Embassy is making efforts to maintain close contacts and to coordinate cooperation. An important milestone in bilateral relations is the establishment of a one-month visa free regime for Kazakh citizens travelling to the Emirates. It certainly

gave a positive impetus to bilateral relations,” he said. Kazakhstan, likewise, included the UAE in the list of countries whose citizens enjoy a one-month visa free travel to the Central Asian nation.

Converging cooperation approaches create unique opportunities for mutually beneficial joint projects in fields such as construction, chemistry, transportation and logistics, railway, engineering and space.

The largest bilateral construction investment project is the \$1.2 billion Abu Dhabi Plaza multifunctional complex in the capital. Contacts are being developed with Mubadala (UAE state investment and development company), the National Corporation for Nuclear Energy and Dubai International Financial Centre.

The breakthrough chemical project is constructing an integrated gas chemical complex (IGCC) and polypropylene plant in the National Industrial Petrochemical Technopark special economic zone (SEZ) in the Atyrau Region, a testament to the long-term nature of the partnership.

Continued on Page A3

Tokayev calls for a new economic course

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has called for a new economic course and instructed the government, his administration and the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs at a Jan. 24 expanded government meeting to develop an economic reform programme by May 15.

The government and Kazakh Parliament have adopted programmes to achieve the macroeconomic goals set out in President Tokayev’s election campaign platform and his state-to-the-nation address. But many details concerning how to achieve economic growth across sectors remain under discussion.

“We have to improve our legislation and regulation based on best international practices, in particular, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in all areas from healthcare to financial markets,” said Tokayev.

Lending stagnated as the loan portfolio to gross domestic product (GDP) decreased from 23 to 22 percent in 2019. The country also observed the highest level of inflation in the Eurasian Economic Union. The President has also noted the government needs to address slow growth in non-oil exports and a lack of an increase in labour productivity in 2019.

The President reaffirmed his commitment to the objectives set by Kazakhstan’s First President Nursultan Nazarbayev in the Strategy 2050, Strategic Plan for the Development of the Country until



Photo credit: Akorda Press

2025 and the Plan of the Nation of 100 Concrete Steps.

“We need a new economic course to see clearly the key problems and methods to solve them. Reforms, as is known, require will and decisiveness. This is what I ask of the government. For the time being, however, the decisions are taken slowly by the government apparatus with an eye on the numerous legal acts and the need for interagency coordination. It is no longer possible to work like that against the backdrop of toughening international competition and fair demands from the people. We will have to push the reforms through, literally, by ‘bending over the knee’,” Tokayev stressed.

The government is set to build a transparent fiscal and industrial policy to protect entrepreneurs, to provide access to sales markets, to increase the productivity of enterprises and competitiveness and to increase the quality of domestic products.

The head of state noted that the basis of economic reform includes the growth of per capita income through job creation and increases in salaries, through the improvement of the quality of human capital and the building of a transparent fiscal policy.

Monetary policy and a dynamic financial market should provide long-term and affordable financing of economy, said

the President. The development of entrepreneurship and the strengthening of mechanisms to strengthen competition protections are essential.

During the government meeting, the President also set the task to establish the Centre for Analysis and Monitoring of Socio-Economic Reforms under the Presidential Administration without any budgetary costs. The centre will operate on a voluntary basis and will later be transformed into a Presidential Reform Agency. The centre will consist of representatives of the scientific and expert community.

Continued on Page A2

INSIDE

NATION

President stresses modern-day relevance of Abai’s ideas **A2**

Asset Iskeshev appointed Security Council Secretary **A2**

ECONOMY

Senate should create Agribusiness Complex Council, says Nazarbayeva **A4**

New rules for currency exchange offices include authorised capital amount, data capture and office hour changes **A4**

EDITORIAL

Kazakhstan to be at centre of Fourth Industrial Revolution, battle against climate change **A6**

BUSINESS

Nazarbayev University scientists develop mobile app for coeliac disease awareness **A7**

Tchibo Kazakhstan launches first coffee shops with convenience stores, promotes green business ideas **A8**

NATION&CAPITAL

Tokayev encourages youth to take innovative approach to government **B1**

Travel blogger popularises country’s tourism **B6**

President stresses modern-day relevance of Abai’s ideas

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev published Jan. 9 an article titled “Abai and Kazakhstan in the 21st Century” in the Egemen Kazakhstan newspaper in honour of Kazakh poet, writer, philosopher, composer and translator Abai Kunanbayev’s 175th anniversary.

In the article, Tokayev shares his thoughts about the relevance of Abai’s ideas to the contemporary world and what people should still learn from them.

The article has four sections presenting Abai as a person who is exemplary to the national identity, who takes interest in the state affairs, has compassion for a new society and is a figure of world culture.

In the first section, Tokayev discusses how the thinker emphasises the importance of education and science.

“Looking at Abai’s works, we can see that he always wanted the country to advance and prosper and he praised this idea. And we know the progress is the basis of education and science. Abai wholeheartedly wanted Kazakhs to unstoppably continue studying.”

According to him, the law on the status of a teacher is a small step towards this greater idea.

“Teachers play a key role in raising educated and conscious offspring. It is our responsibility to respect a teacher. Therefore, the state should improve the status of a teaching profession and ensure conditions for their jobs.”

The knowledge of science should also be accompanied with speaking several languages, including the native language.

“In the new historical context, we all need to pay attention to the development and promotion of our native language and to enhance its status. In addition, learning English should be a priority. The more languages our youth will learn, the more opportunities they will have. However, they should be aware of their native language. The younger generation will bring only goodness to the country if they, as Abai



Photo credit: egemen.kz.

said, will be fully knowledgeable in science, respect their own language and truly become polyglots.”

“Abai’s principles are in line with the principles of a civilised state. Justice will be firmly established only if the rule of law, the openness of government and the accountability of the people are at a high level and civil society representatives are actively involved in the affairs of the state.”

The President called on people to strive to be the intellectual nation in Abai’s understanding, which is

self-aware, self-developing and prioritising education and science above all. According to him, Abai originated the term “intellectual nation.”

“The poet encouraged the people to master different kinds of art. He clearly knew that all of this was a matter of time, and he spoke to the nation earlier. Even the idea of forming an intellectual nation, which we are talking about today, can be argued from Abai. The great thinker, in every word, sought to grow the nation,” he said.

“In this regard, the word of Abai should become the guiding star of the generation,” he said.

In the second section, Tokayev stressed Kazakhs need to strengthen their statehood to grow and prosper. This entails the “importance of respecting the statehood for citizens, especially the youth,” just society and meritocracy.

“Abai’s principles are in line with the principles of a civilised state. Justice will be firmly established only if the rule of law, the openness of government and the accountability of the people are at a high level and civil society representatives are actively involved in the affairs of the state,” he said.

According to Tokayev, he pro-

posed his “listening state” initiative to develop Abai’s main condition to just society.

“A constructive dialogue between government and society strengthens trust in the state. Government members, including ministers and akims (governors), must take into account the suggestions and wishes of citizens when making decisions on matters of state and social importance,” he said.

Tokayev said people with populist ideas “who think of change do not care about the future of the country” and should not mislead the citizens.

“Populism has gained a global character as a negative trend. Around the world, there is often the voices of groups who have no clear strategy and who seek power through bare slogans... Indeed, this is a dangerous process that undermines the development of any country and undermines the nation’s identity,” he said.

In the third section, the President stressed it is necessary to re-think Abai’s concept of a complete human, which corresponds to the concept of a man of integrity in English.

“We need to re-study Abai’s concept of a complete human, in which scientists need to carry out

more research. The concept of a complete human should, in essence, be a fundamental pillar in any area of our life, government and education, business and family institutions. I think,” he said.

The characteristic describes only those who are very self-confident and striving for good, he said.

The President emphasised the poet valued hardworking people and called on people to stop wasting their time on unimportant things.

“One of the themes at the heart of Abai’s work is the struggle with drunkenness. The poet constantly urges himself to be vigilant, not to worry about carelessness and laughter. He seeks to keep working through constant hard work. He propagandised to work hard, to seek knowledge,” Tokayev wrote.

Tokayev finalised the section signifying importance of learning a craft to earn for a living, instead of relying on livestock as the poet told in his thirty third Word of Wisdom.

“I think the ideas of the great poet are relevant for the society of Kazakhstan today. That is why today we mark getting rid of the psychology of addiction to raw materials and the maximum prosperity of small and medium businesses,” he said.

In the fourth section, Tokayev ponders on the idea that Kazakhstan can use Abai’s legacy to introduce Kazakh culture to the world.

“Over the years of my diplomatic service, I have often met politicians and experts in various fields. I exchanged views with foreigners on many common problems with humanity. In general, they are well aware of the political and economic achievements of Kazakhstan. (But they) are not well acquainted with our spiritual and cultural values. In this regard, the question arises: Why don’t we reveal Kazakh culture through Abai?” he said.

“Indeed, the works of a wise poet can enrich the spiritual life of not only the Kazakhs, but also the whole human race. Because the content of Abai’s works is full of universal values,” he said.

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Capital residents may participate in creating the Nur-Sultan Comfortable City master plan through the city’s development accelerator, according to the city administration. All proposals related to constructing social facilities, expanding the roadway and increasing bike routes should be lodged at www.nursultansmartaccelerator.com. Individuals may also participate in master plan meetings and discussions. “The platform will enhance feedback from people and implement their ideas and suggestions. The programme for the development of public spaces is important in the concept of the city for people. The city should be convenient for pedestrians, as well as people should have places to spend their free time. We will create all the necessary conditions for this,” said Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov.

Almaty, Nur-Sultan and Uralsk led in regional digitisation performance, reported the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry. The study involved 14 regional centres and three cities of national significance. The assessment was based on smart city standards consisting of 11 different directions and 80 indicators such as healthcare, education, housing and communal services, transport, environment, social sector and other spheres. The rating is designed to increase digital activity in the regions. “Digital Kazakhstan was adopted two years ago. Many digital projects were implemented in the regions. We made this rating to show the results. We believe it will be a good incentive to increase digital activity in the regions,” said Vice Minister Ablaikhan Ospanov.

Subsidies for all state programmes increased 80 percent in 2019 compared with the same period in 2018, reported Forbes.kz. Changes were made to cancel regional coordination councils under akimats (administrations), as well as expand housing initiatives through the Housing Construction Savings Bank and second-tier banks, sales and the 7-20-25 mortgage programme. “We supported 8,600 projects worth 302 billion tenge (US\$800 million) under the loan guarantee programme. The guarantee conditions were signed with eight banks and the banks make decisions, which reduces the terms of consideration. This was possible due to the fact that in 2017 we revised the strategy as part of the support of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises,” said Damu Fund Managing Director Aiman Sarsengaliyeva at the press conference.

Approximately 1.5 million people visited Turkestan’s Khoja Ahmed Yassawi Mausoleum in 2019, reported Kazinform, and the plan is to increase the figure to five million by 2025. Authorities are developing historical and cultural tourism in Otrar and Turkestan, eco-tourism in the Tolebi and Tyulkubas districts and the Saryagash district resort zone. “We have 168 hotels, 51 resorts and 60 recreation centres in the region. We launched 57 tourist routes. This year, there are plans to open 20 hotels. The hotels in Turkestan are undergoing major repairs in accordance with international requirements. The construction of the visitor centre, national centre for traditional crafts on the Silk Road, the international airport, the Museum of Khoja Ahmed Yassawi and other tourist facilities are underway,” said Turkestan Region Deputy Akim (Governor) Meirzhan Myrzaliyev at a Jan. 20 Regional Communications Service meeting.

More than 30 families, or 206 people, moved to Pavlodar in 2019 as part of the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship 2017-2021 programme, reported the regional press service Jan. 22. The initiative aims to increase labour mobility. The government paid the individuals more than 18 million tenge (US\$48,000) in subsidies and 60 million tenge (US\$160,000) to rent housing. Families moved from the Almaty, Kyzylorda, Mangistau, Turkestan and Zhambyl regions and Almaty, Nur-Sultan and Shymkent. “The reasons of internal migration include returning to one’s homeland, a quality education and labour opportunities,” said a Pavlodar administration spokesperson.

A new economic course

Continued from Page A1

Tokayev also declared a long-term moratorium on expenses for the purchase of expensive transportation, furniture, and holding of forums, seminars and conferences.

The President instructed authorities to develop a Trade Policy Programme 2025, develop the National Certification System and develop and adopt the Law on Technical Regulation by the end of the year.

The share of agriculture in Kazakhstan’s GDP has not exceeded 4.5 percent despite more than 2.4 trillion tenge (US\$6.3 billion) allocated to the sector over the past five years. The Ministry of Agriculture has been directed to create conditions for the processing of raw products in the country.

The President also noted that housing construction is a government priority. In 2019, social sup-

port expenses were 3.5 trillion tenge (US\$9.2 billion) or 30 percent of the state budget. Approximately four million people are included in the social protection programme. Some 20,000 families have received loans as part of the Bakytty Otbasy (Happy Family) and 7-20-25 mortgage programmes.

Tokayev also called for more stringent registration of cars imported from Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries.

“Most of the imported cars are not registered. The Prosecutor General will provide us a legal assessment of this issue. The authorities should provide the temporary registration of cars imported from EAEU countries as of Feb. 1 in a month. Registration will be valid until March 1, 2021. People have to pay the registration fee and tax. Temporary registration should be carried out without the right of

alienation and transfer to use and disposal to other persons,” he said.

Prime Minister Askar Mamin also said during the meeting that the Kazakh government will create more than 400,000 jobs in tourism, trade and construction, manufacturing and agriculture in 2020.

Mamin also presented a summary of major socio-economic indicators in the country.

Incomes in Kazakhstan increased 5.5 percent and GDP growth was 4.5 percent in 2019. Non-resource sectors accounted for 80 percent of growth. Construction, trade, transport and production sector became the main drivers of growth. The manufacturing industry grew 4.4 percent in 2019. The mining industry grew 3.7 percent in 2019 as a result of an increase in metal ore production by 16 percent.

“One of the most important priorities is to create new jobs. The investment projects ensure

a transition to a new level in the production of goods and services, which leads to labour productivity increase up to 8.2 million tenge (US\$21,660) per person,”

The President instructed authorities to develop a Trade Policy Programme 2025, develop the National Certification System and develop and adopt the Law on Technical Regulation by the end of the year.

said Mamin. Labour productivity in 2019 was 7.4 million tenge (US\$19,500) per person.

Asset Isekeshev appointed Security Council Secretary

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev appointed Jan. 16 Asset Isekeshev Assistant to the President and Secretary of the Security Council, reported akorda.kz.

Isekeshev, 48, replaced Kalmukhanbet Kassymov, who had previously served as Minister of Internal Affairs from 2011 to 2019. In the reshuffle, Kassymov was appointed head of the Kazakhstan State Guard Service that incorporates the national guard and the security service and which guards top govern-



Photo credit: Inform.kz.

ment officials and some major buildings.

Isekeshev graduated from the Law School of Al-Farabi Kazakh State University in Almaty in 1994. In 1998, he graduated from

the Higher School of Public Administration under the President of Kazakhstan.

After that he worked at the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms and the Ministry of Economy and Budget Planning. In 2003, he became Vice Minister for Industry and Trade, a position he occupied until May 2006. Following that, he worked as Kazyna Sustainable Development Fund’s Board Deputy Chair.

In 2008-2009, Isekeshev served as Assistant to the President. Along with this, he became Samruk Kazyna National Welfare Fund board member.

In 2009, he was appointed Min-

ister of Industry and Trade. The next year, he became Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and New Technologies. Since March 2010 he started working as a Deputy Prime Minister while holding the position of the Minister of Industry and New Technologies. Isekeshev was reappointed to these positions twice, in 2011 and 2014.

From 2014 to 2016, he occupied the position of the Minister for Investment and Development.

In 2016-2018, Isekeshev served as Akim (Mayor) of the capital city of Astana (later renamed Nur-Sultan).

In September 2018, Isekeshev

was appointed the President’s Chief of Staff, where he served until March 2019.

The last position he held before the new appointment was the Executive Director of the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan – Elbasy where he oversaw both the operations of the foundations and its charitable projects in the areas of education and youth, among others.

Kazakhstan’s First President Nursultan Nazarbayev, following his voluntary resignation in March 2019, remains the chairman of the Security Council of the country and the leader of the ruling Nur Otan party.

EURASIA&WORLD

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

EXTERNAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhstan will start exchanging experts, witnesses and crime suspects with Brazil, reported 24.kz Jan. 22. The initial agreement was signed June 20, 2018. “If we need to invite an expert, a witness from Brazil or someone who is of great importance for the investigation of a criminal case, we can invite [the person],” said Kazakh Deputy Head Prosecutor Marat Akhmetzhanov while presenting the ratification bill in Parliament. He noted there are no Kazakh nor Brazilian citizens who would currently be affected by the agreement, but the document has created a legal basis for cooperation. Kazakhstan has similar agreements with 21 countries, with Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Greece soon planning to sign such documents.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Margulan Baimukhan held talks with German Bundestag Deputy Dirk Wiese, the government’s coordinator regarding cooperation with Russia, Central Asia and the Eastern Partnership countries, Kazinform reported Jan. 14 referring to the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs press service. The parties discussed implementing the agreements reached during the Dec. 5 meeting between Kazakh President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as cooperation prospects at the interregional level.

Kazakh oil exports to China were temporarily stopped due to problems with the oil composites, said a Kazakh Ministry of Energy press service representative. “In this regard, the export of Kazakh oil to China was suspended (the decrease was 30,900 tonnes against the plan of 34,600 tonnes). The resumption of Kazakhstan oil exports to China is expected after the settlement of issues of the quality of the oil being handed over from the resources of CNPC-Aktobemunaigas,” he noted. The ministry and Kaztransoil are currently working on redirecting the oil to ensure an adequate supply.

The Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO) signed a memorandum of cooperation with Kazakh Invest on Jan. 21. Prior to the event, SARIO General Director Robert Simonovic told Kazinform that “SARIO plans to sign a memorandum of cooperation with Kazakh Invest to organise roundtables and business meetings between business representatives of both countries in order to exchange information and organise such future events within and outside the meetings of the intergovernmental commission,” he said. “Based on the trade exchange and the potential of both countries, it can be noted that the most promising areas of cooperation between Slovakia and Kazakhstan are agriculture and waste management, energy and the food industry,” he added.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev met Jan. 15 with GRECO (The Group of States against Corruption) Executive Secretary Gianluca Esposito. Tokayev noted Kazakhstan’s participation in the organisation will give the country additional impetus to combat corruption and the nation will contribute to solving other problems that impede progress. Esposito indicated Kazakhstan’s membership will contribute not only to promoting the principles and mechanisms of the fight against corruption, but also to improving the business climate, thereby enhancing the scope of public services.

A regular meeting of the government delegations in the Kazakh-Uzbek Demarcation Commission was held Jan. 20-24 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The commission prepared drafts for final documents on the demarcation of the state border to the site in the Kyzylorda and Turkestan Regions of Kazakhstan, adjacent to the Jizzakh and Navoi regions of Uzbekistan. The delegations prepared a draft Action Plan for the preparation of the final documents on the demarcation of the Kazakh-Uzbek state border.

FM visits Brussels in advance of new Kazakhstan-EU cooperation agreement entry into force

By Elya Altynsarina

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi made his first visit to Brussels Jan. 20 to participate in the 17th meeting of the Cooperation Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan-the European Union and meet with high-level officials.

Earlier on the same day, the council adopted the conclusion of the EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) signed in 2015. The new agreement that has also been ratified by all member states and the European Parliament will enter into force March 1. Kazakhstan was the first country in Central Asia to sign the EPCA in 2015.

“The new ECPA, (...), opens the way to both a deepening and expansion of many ties between us at an important moment in Kazakhstan’s economic, social and political development. It is why it is an exciting time to be making my first visit to Brussels as foreign minister this week. I am



L-R: Kazakh Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia Gordan Grlic Radman shake hands before the meeting.

determined to do all I can to build on the already strong partnership between Kazakhstan and the EU and ensure new opportunities for increased cooperation are taken,” wrote Minister Tileuberdi in an op-ed published on Euractiv ahead of the visit.

Delegations to the council meeting also discussed political, trade and economic cooperation and implementation of the new EU strategy and Europe-Asia inter-connectedness.

Council representatives also said they are ready to work with

Kazakhstan to apply the EPCA in 29 areas of cooperation, such as international and regional security, trade, investment, infrastructure development, as well as innovation, culture, sports and tourism.

Other priority areas of the agreement were energy, transport, the environment, education and science, according to a press release by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Trade with EU countries accounts for 50 percent of Kazakhstan’s foreign trade while the EU is also the largest investor in the Kazakh economy.

Between January and November 2019, trade between Kazakhstan and EU memberstates reached \$28.7 billion (exports \$22.7 billion, imports \$6 billion).

Foreign direct investment from the EU to Kazakhstan in the first six months of 2019 reached \$5.4 billion.

The Cooperation Council meeting was Chaired by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia Gordan Grlic Radman and Minister Tileuberdi.

On the sidelines of the Coop-

eration Council meeting, Minister Tileuberdi met with High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell as well as members of the European Parliament, including members of the Kazakhstan-EU Friendship Group and the Delegation of the European Parliament for Central Asia and Mongolia to discuss regional development in Central Asia and political reforms that have had a positive impact on democratic changes in society.

The European Parliament members hailed the decision of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to accede to the Second Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at abolishing the death penalty in the country, as well as initiatives on peaceful assemblies, decriminalising defamation and lowering the threshold for creating political parties.

Tokayev is scheduled to visit Brussels in February to discuss relations between Kazakhstan and the EU.

Kazakh Ambassador discusses cooperation with Utah

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the United States Yerzhan Kazykhanov paid a working visit to Utah Jan. 15-17, where he met with Utah Governor Gary Herbert, President of Brigham Young University (BYU) Kevin Worthen, Director of the World Trade Centre Utah Miles Hansen as well as representatives of local American companies, reports Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Kazakh ambassador and the governor discussed the development of bilateral relations as well as promising areas of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Utah.

Kazykhanov noted the potential for cooperation in developing tourism and promoting Kazakh goods on the U.S. market during his meeting with Hansen. He expressed interest in establishing contacts with local U.S. companies.

At BYU, Kazykhanov delivered a lecture to students on the topic “Kazakhstan and the United States in 2020: New Decade of Partner-

ship” and answered the audience’s questions.

To mark the 175th anniversary of Abai Kunanbayev and the 1150th anniversary of Al-Farabi and celebrate the cultural and humanitarian links between Kazakhstan and the U.S., Kazykhanov presented a two-volume anthology of Kazakh literature and commemorative coins of Al-Farabi to Worthen.

BYU is one of the largest religious universities in the United States, with more than 32,000 students. In 2019, the university ranked first in Forbes and the Wall

Street Journal in terms of price and quality of education.

At a meeting with the governing body of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the dominant religion in Utah and widely known as the Mormon church, the ambassador shared information about Kazakhstan’s efforts to strengthen interreligious and inter-faith dialogue, its implementation of peacekeeping and humanitarian projects as well as the maintenance of regional and international security.

Representatives of the Mormon

community were particularly interested in the initiative of First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to hold Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. The American side expressed its readiness to consider sending church representatives to the upcoming seventh Congress in 2021.

Today’s Mormon church arose from the Latter-day Saints Restoration Christianity movement, created by religious figure Joseph Smith Jr. in upstate New York in the 1820s.

UAE, Kazakhstan have unique cooperation opportunities, says envoy

Continued from Page A1

Two important framework agreements have been signed in transportation and logistics. The first involves the basic principles of DP World’s participation in capital for the Khorgos-Eastern Gate Special Economic Zone (SEZ) management company. The agreement between the Mangistau Region akimat (administration) and DP World to purchase 49 percent of the Aktau Seaport SEZ shares will help develop the seaport. Both agreements are set to help expand the country’s transport potential.

DP World, which operates terminals, free zones and ports globally, will utilise its best management experience at the Jebel Ali free economic zone and together with Kazakh partners, ensure attracting approximately \$1 billion in investments to Kazakhstan by the end of this year. Cooperating with the largest port operator will allow Kazakhstan to strengthen SEZ work in Aktau and Khorgos

and provide powerful impetus for growing the country’s investment potential.

Developing military and technical cooperation and assisting Kazakh machine-building enterprises in accessing UAE distribution channels are another promising bilateral cooperation area. Kazakhstan currently has a representative engineering office in the Khalifa Industrial Zone (Kizad) in Abu Dhabi.

Kazakhstan and the UAE have made a significant breakthrough in space cooperation. The countries are currently promoting joint space exploration projects, as well as working on the Baikonur rocket complex and the possibility of coordinating to modernise the Soyuz launch site. Kazakh, Russian and UAE space agency representatives signed a protocol last year to expand trilateral space cooperation, a project to be implemented by 2025. The joint activities constitute a logical extension of space cooperation and the Baiterek project feasibility study

will begin this year. An Emirati astronaut flew to the International Space Station this month, making the UAE the 19th country to visit.

“Three years ago, I was appointed the UAE ambassador to Kazakhstan and throughout the time, I can say that the approach is changing. Whereas in the past bilateral cooperation may have been conducted mostly on a high level, today we face the process of promoting collaboration in many different fields,” said Al Jaber.

Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) meetings represent an important step in developing Kazakh-Emirati trade-economic relations, acting as a platform to resolve the main issues to enhance cooperation between the countries. IGC has held seven meetings to date, the last on Sept. 8-9, 2019.

There has been a remarkable growth in recent years in bilateral trade and economic cooperation. Trade turnover from 2005-2019 was more than \$3.7 billion and UAE investments in Kazakhstan

exceeded \$2 billion. As trade ties continue to grow, they have contributed significantly to establishing several joint agriculture, energy and mining projects and developing potential trade and economic relations projects.

Cultural and humanitarian cooperation, noted Al Jaber, is the basis for strengthening mutual trust and friendship, as cultural events show the diversity and similarities of Emirati and Kazakh culture. Each event deepens interest and opens prospects for cooperation in various fields. The most significant are exhibitions of decorative and applied art, cultural days and movie screenings.

“I always say that Kazakhstan and the UAE have all the real opportunities to establish the bridge that connects the two most important regions in the world, through which we will be able to exchange not only goods and services, but also scientific thought and cultural values. We have everything for this – a solid legal base, mutual support, coincidence of priorities,

resources and readiness for practical steps. I believe that in 2020 our countries will expand and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation,” he said.

Al Jaber also spoke about the upcoming visit of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to the UAE. He feels the trip will provide the impetus for cooperation between the UAE and Kazakhstan, the basis of which was established by the leaders of both nations – UAE founder His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan and First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev.

“We expect new agreements to be reached during the meetings. It will help to enhance strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the UAE. Undoubtedly, President Tokayev’s visit testifies to an unprecedented interaction from the perspective of international relations, thanks to which the cooperation between Kazakhstan and the UAE is moving forward,” he added.

Central Asian country representatives discuss new extremism tendencies

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Government, civil society and international organisation representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan met in Dushanbe, Tajikistan Dec. 17-18 for the fourth New Tendencies in Violent Extremism and Preventive Measures regional dialogue, reported undp.org.

“This dialogue serves as a platform for governments, experts and the research community to explore and elaborate on required measures in strengthening prevention of violent extremism. In particular, it is crucial for young people who are mostly at risk of being targeted by violent extremism,” said Pratibha Mehta, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Tajikistan.

The discussion centred on the tendencies and challenges caused by extremist organisations using digital methods for attracting new members and spreading extremist messages. Governments in the region have responded to these challenges with corresponding policies, and dialogue participants noted the efficiency of the strategies.

Those in attendance also ex-

changed their expertise and experience in repatriating, rehabilitating and socially reintegrating citizens who joined international conflicts. The project aims to build community resilience to violent extremism in Central Asia by improving young people’s socio-economic status.

The event was held within the Strengthening Community Resilience and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia regional project

funded by the Japanese government and implemented by UNDP. The \$6.4-million project is being executed in a 30-month period from 2018-2020.

The initiative is aimed at mobilising Central Asian young people as a potential force to counter extremist influences and narratives in vulnerable communities. The objective will hopefully be achieved in the four countries through local-level youth engagement initiatives and measures to improve their employability. The range of activities is aimed at supporting regional networking, as well as exchanging knowledge and experiences in relation to preventing youth radicalisation in the region.

ECONOMY

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Senate should create Agribusiness Complex Council, says Speaker

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh Senate should create an Agribusiness Complex Council, said Speaker Dariga Nazarbayeva at the Jan. 17 meeting with agriculture sector representatives.

“We need to create a council on the agro-industrial complex under the Senate until we bring it to mind with the programme and with all the proposals. We will carefully consider all the recommendations and try to include them in the document, which we will forward to the government. All interested parties could enter this council – representatives of the agro-industrial complex, government, local executive authorities and the field of science and training,” she noted.

The council would tackle problems including storing the plant gene pool, the existing system of primary seeds, lack of control over the domestic seed market and grain standards.

“All these factors doom the fields to low productivity. We suggest making changes to the control system for seed production and allowing the launch of promising varieties of crops on the market without waiting for a three-year cycle



Dariga Nazarbayeva

of registration in the registry,” said Kazakh Research Institute of Agriculture and Plant Growing General Director Andrei Ageenko.

Another issue facing Kazakh agribusiness is the lack of qualified young personnel. Of the 10,000 graduates of the Bolashak education abroad state programme, only 70 work in the agrarian field.

Karabalyk Agricultural Experimental Station General Director Damir Kaldybaev spoke about the Scientific Country programme that seeks to draw graduates to the rural sector.

“In order to increase the attractiveness of rural science for young people and meet the needs of agricultural producers in scientific research, we started the implementation of this project last year. Approximately 880 million tenge (US\$2.33 million) was allocated from the regional akimat (government), 21 kilometers of road were repaired for 380 million tenge (US\$1 million) and we will restore engineering and social infrastructure for 500 million tenge (US\$1.33 million),” he said.

Transit of goods through country grew 23 percent in 2019

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The transit of goods through Kazakhstan grew 23 percent to 664,000 containers and total transit revenues for Kazakhstan reached more than 450 billion tenge (US\$1.2 billion) in 2019, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Industrial Development reported Jan. 20.

Among this cargo, the number of containers in the direction of China – Europe – China increased 11 percent to 347,000 TEU containers.

Approximately 17.5 million tonnes of goods transited through Kazakhstan in 2019. Of that, 75.6 percent or 11.5 million tonnes were in route to Central Asian countries. In particular, cargo to Uzbekistan totalled 7.1 million

tonnes, to Kyrgyzstan 2.26 million tonnes, to Tajikistan 1.2 million tonnes and to Afghanistan 0.26 million tonnes. Outside of Central Asia, cargo to Russia accounted for 2.8 percent, China 13.8 percent and European Union countries 7.1 percent.

Specific types of cargo transported through Kazakhstan via railway include oil at 18.5 percent, ferrous metals at 10.7 percent, chemicals and soda at 6.8 percent, chemical and mineral fertilisers 2.2 percent, grain at 1.7 percent and other types of cargo totalling 55.6 percent.

The volume of transit goods transported via roads amounted to 1.93 million tonnes. The main directions of the road transit were as follows: from China to the countries of the European Union at 14,000 tonnes, to Central Asian

countries 779,000 tonnes and to Russia 61,700 tonnes of cargo.

Cargo originating in Central Asian nations included 106,500 tonnes to the European Union, 396,000 tonnes to Russia and 5,400 tonnes to China. Approximately 9,700 tonnes of cargo were delivered from Russia to the countries of Central Asia, 567,000 tonnes from the countries of the European Union to Central Asia and 2,700 tonnes of cargo to China.

Goods transported via road consisted primarily of automobiles and equipment. Of that, electronic equipment accounted for 20.1 percent of transit, plant products 17.3 percent, consumer goods 15 percent, raw materials, fabrics and textile materials 11.5 percent and other goods 8.6 percent.

Digital Kazakhstan programme created 8,000 jobs in 2019

Continued from Page A1

Online doctor appointments have reduced live queues by 30 percent and halved patient time spent in polyclinics. The electronic labour exchange halved the processing time and made the procedure transparent.

In 2019, more than 488,000 applicants were employed through e-service, approximately 350,000 of whom gained permanent employment. Kazakh citizens signed 742,000 electronic contracts.

The programme has also digitised economic sectors. It introduced digital technologies at fuel, energy, mining and metallurgical complexes with elements of Industry 4.0 among their technological re-equipment.

Embamunaigas, Karazhanbas-munai, Kazgermunai and Ozenmunaygas have been using the intellectual field information system. The system optimised electricity consumption cost up to 15 percent, stabilised production level to 2 percent and provides centralised field management and remote monitoring.

The programme has also digitised economic sectors. It introduced digital technologies at fuel, energy, mining and metallurgical complexes with elements of Industry 4.0 among their technological re-equipment.

The magistral project has improved train traffic safety, as it detects track faults and rail defects in a timely manner. Three mobile diagnostic system units currently examine trunk network infrastructure and the project is planning to add three more units. The system examined 19,000 kilometres of track during the fourth quarter of 2019, identifying 190 kilometres of poorly rated track and 85 pieces of dangerous rails.

The Intelligent Transportation System project digitised transport and logistics. The system collects and processes data on roads, vehicles, toll roads and intercity bus pas-

sengers, as well as on issued tickets. The project also installed toll systems on the Almaty-Kapchagai (42 kilometres), Almaty-Khorgos (295 kilometres) and Astana-Temirtau (134 kilometres) roads.

In September, the project introduced 24 special automated measuring instruments that identified approximately 82 weight violations and recovered 8.6 million tenge (US\$22,685.3) in fees and fines.

The project has been creating model digital factories that will demonstrate digitisation’s effect and impact, identify barriers and develop state support tools. As a part of the programme, work began on 51 projects and 16 were completed.

Astana Hub, one of big parts of Digital Kazakhstan, has created conditions for obtaining tax, labour and visa benefits and start-up development programmes.

“The programmes of our technology park gave us the opportunity to understand how good Kazakhstan’s start-up projects are and how rapidly they are moving towards the level of a developed international start-up ecosystem. After examining the quality of our projects, we can conclude that our investment in them paid off,” said Astana Hub General Director Joseph Ziegler, reported the press service.

To date, the hub has given rise to 163 IT companies, nearly 700 start-ups, 17 research and development centres involving domestic and foreign IT companies and the Alem programming school. The local content share is 57.7 percent.

In 2019, Astana Hub organised more than 530 events attended by approximately 17,000 visitors. The techno park also inked memorandums of cooperation with 25 international organisations.

“These measures helped create favourable conditions for the development of a start-up culture and attracted more than 18 billion tenge (US\$47.48 million) in 2019 in domestic start-up projects. The total volume of attracted investments in the IT market of Kazakhstan over the past two years amounted to approximately 32.4 billion tenge (US\$85.47 million),” said the statement.

In education, 6,703 of 7,014 schools were equipped with computers. School students use electronic diaries and journals.

“The digitisation of the education system has reduced the gap in the quality of education between rural and urban schools by more than 30 percent,” it added.

ECONOMIC NEWS IN BRIEF

Almaty showed a positive trend in all sectors of the city’s economy in 2019. The gross regional product per capita grew 4.8 percent and investments in fixed assets, 8.5 percent. Retail trade grew 12.1 percent; transport and warehousing, 11.9 percent; housing construction, 4.8 percent; industry, 4.5 percent and construction, 3.4 percent. Almaty attracted more than 820 billion tenge (US\$2.16 billion) in investments, an 8.3-percent increase, of which 620 billion tenge (US\$1.64 billion) were private. More than 47,000 jobs have been created, including more than 35,000 by business entities and 12,000 under state programmes.

The Kazakh National Bank will develop a draft 2030 Monetary Policy Strategy by the end of the first quarter of 2020, announced chairperson Yerbolat Dossayev during the Jan. 24 expanded government meeting. The financial regulator will implement the strategy in two stages. The first stage will be synchronised with the 2025 national strategic plan; the second will focus on long-term tasks to fully implement policy inflation targeting.

Kazakhstan will reduce state participation in entrepreneurial activity with the new amendments to the draft Law “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts on Improving the Business Climate,” reported inform.kz. The amendments should eliminate competition barriers. “Market entities with state participation can be created in the activities of state monopoly, ensuring national security and the state’s defence capabilities and the use of strategic facilities, as well as the insufficient level of development of competition determined by the analysis of the relevant product market,” said National Economy Deputy Minister Zhaslan Madiyev during the Jan. 23 bill presentation in the Majilis (lower house of Parliament).

The Kazkosmos Aerospace Committee completed space monitoring services in 2019 to address 32 industry tasks in four state bodies. The committee conducted continuous monitoring of arable land and created digital farmland vector maps. Digitised agricultural land occupies more than 33 million hectares, of which 19.4 million are defined as arable land, 12.4 million as deposits and 1.6 million as hayfields, according to the report. Kazkosmos also monitored the municipal solid waste accumulated in 17 large cities. It identified more than 10,000 natural dump formations within 50 kilometres of city borders, as well as violations of the licensed dump boundaries. To improve land use efficiency, the government plans to fully integrate the automated information system data with the state land cadastre.

As of Jan. 1, Unified Accumulation Pension Fund (UAPF) pension assets totalled 10.8 trillion tenge (US\$28.53 billion), according to its investment activity review. The weighted average yield to maturity of debt financial instruments in the fund’s investment portfolio reached 7.1 percent per annum, including 8.7 percent per annum in tenge and 3.2 percent per annum in foreign currency. The main share (40.45 percent) of the UAPF pension assets portfolio is in government securities, where the value decreased by 19.19 billion tenge (US\$50.69 million) during the reporting month to 4.37 trillion tenge (US\$11.54 billion). The cost of foreign government securities totalled 1.24 trillion tenge (US\$3.28 billion), or an 11.44-percent share of the portfolio.

The Ministry of Energy has suspended exports of Kazakh oil to China. The results of Jan. 16 oil quality tests indicated an excess of organochlorine compounds in the fraction boiling up to 204 degrees Celsius in Kaztransoil’s trunk pipeline system when receiving oil from CPNC-Aktobemunaigas. The same day, oil reception from CNPC-Aktobemunaigas was stopped until the quality issues of the delivered oil were settled, reported the ministry. The decrease in exported oil reached 30,900 tonnes, with a plan of 34,600 tonnes.

New rules for currency exchange offices include authorised capital amount, data capture and office hour changes

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The new rules for Kazakh currency exchange office operations include changes in the authorised capital amount, data capture and office hours, said National Bank Cash Management Department Director Zhomart Kazhmuratov in the bank’s Jan. 14 statement to the media, according to Forbes.kz.

The first change will standardise the authorised capital amount in cities, with a special lower amount for smaller cities and villages.

“First, the plan was to establish the same amount of authorised capital in the amount of 100 million tenge (US\$264,398) for all non-bank exchange offices, regardless of the location. Now, the size of the authorised capital for offices located in villages and small towns has been reduced to 50 million tenge (US\$132,199),” he said.

Introducing the amendment has also taken longer than originally planned. Rather than becoming effective Jan. 1, the change will be implemented more gradually,

depending on the city’s size and status.

“Second, the timing of the introduction of this norm has been shifted. Initially, we planned to introduce the requirement beginning Jan. 1, 2020. In the adjusted version, for organisations located in cities of national significance, the norm will enter into force April 1, 2020. In administrative centres of regions and cities of regional significance, [this will take place] beginning July 1, 2020. Exchange offices located in villages and small towns are required to provide authorised capital until Jan. 1, 2021,” he added.

The earlier version of the draft law envisioned exchange offices having authorised capital, as well as additional 20 percent, while the current changes require exchange points to have only the authorised capital.

“Third, earlier it was envisaged to oblige exchange offices to have an additional 20 percent of the amount of the authorised capital in their accounts. Now, it is enough to have the authorised capital itself, which is located in bank accounts and/or at the cash



Photo credit: elements.envato.com.

desk and/or in refined gold bullion. These measures will provide exchange offices with sufficient funds for smooth operation,” said Kazhmuratov.

Exchange offices will also be obliged to keep records by having customers provide some form of ID when exchanging currency. Previously, only customers willing to exchange more than 500,000 tenge (US\$1,321) were obliged to provide ID.

“Data capture will take place in

a simplified form. If the amount of operations is up to 500,000 tenge (US\$1,321), then the client provides only an identity document. This is an international practice that is applied in many countries of the world... When exchanging funds in the amount of more than 500,000 tenge (US\$1,321), nothing has changed and the previous procedure (prior to the change) to record data is used,” he noted.

Exchange offices will be open 9

a.m.-8 p.m. Kazhmuratov justified eliminating overnight hours due to security issues and people’s concerns causing foreign currency to be overvalued at night.

“Beginning Feb. 1, exchange offices will be open from 9:00 to 20:00. Changing the work schedule is aimed at improving the security level of exchange offices and their customers. This measure will also help eliminate the facts of overvaluation of the sale of cash foreign currency in the evening and at night and the unjustified occurrence of agitation among the population,” he said.

The only currency exchange offices currently permitted to remain open overnight are those in airports and first category, large shopping centres.

“For the convenience of people entering/leaving the country through airports, railway stations and automobile checkpoints across the state border, the working hours of exchange offices will not be limited. Exchange offices will work around the clock [there] and at large shopping centres of the first category, until 22:00,” he added.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

BUSINESS NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakhtelecom has created the iKapitalist crowdfunding platform to enable citizens to directly finance small and medium-sized businesses. The service provides new opportunities for the country’s entrepreneurs and financiers who want to attract investment for further develop business. According to Chief Innovations Director Nurlan Meirmanov, the company has a network of data centres throughout Kazakhstan and provides a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) services with a high level of fault tolerance and network connectivity. Kazakhtelecom also provides high-quality and affordable service that meets Astana Financial Services Authority (AFSA) security requirements and ensures protecting user data, he added. The company previously launched its own Blockchain platform, which allows creating applications using Blockchain technology and SmartContract.

The Almaty akimat (city administration) began developing rules Jan. 10 to organise trade, which will define the basic requirements for locations installing non-stationary objects of trade (NOT), a common design code and mechanism for allocating seats to entrepreneurs. To date, 250 land plots for NOT installations have been proposed to the chamber, 85 of which have been selected for the first stage, according to Almaty Entrepreneurship and Investment Department head Yerkebulan Orazalin. The tracts will be provided through an auction or by directly concluding agreements with domestic producers. In addition, 50 spots have been identified for food trucks. Special attention will be paid to rules concerning activities at summer venues to ensure they are operated safely. According to the new rules, seasonal platforms can only be placed with stationary catering facilities.

The Development Bank of Kazakhstan provided a loan for Shymkent Chemical Company to construct a new plant in the city producing methyl tert-butyl ether (MTBE). The project cost is 13.7 billion tenge (US\$36.2 million). The bank is providing a 10-year, nine billion tenge (US\$23.8 million) loan and the company will invest the remaining 4.7 billion tenge (US\$12.4 million) at its own expense, reported kapital.kz. The project is aimed at developing the Kazakh petrochemical industry by increasing petrochemical raw materials production. The new enterprise will have an annual capacity of 57,000 tonnes of MTBE, said company General Director Manat Bibasov. The products will allow producing high-quality petroleum products, thereby ensuring the country’s energy security and meeting the needs of the domestic MTBE market, said bank Deputy Chairperson of the Board Duman Aubakirov. Construction is expected to start in mid-2020.

More than 5,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and approximately 42,000 agricultural producers in the Turkestan Region received funding under national and regional programmes. The government allocated 74.6 billion tenge (US\$197.3 million) for the projects last year, 16.5 billion tenge (US\$43.6 million) more than in 2018, said regional Deputy Akim (Governor) Meirzhan Myrzaliev, reported kapital.kz. The region currently has 141,992 SMEs, 108.6 percent more than last year. The businesses manufactured products worth 450 million tenge (US\$1.1 million), 133 percent more than last year, he added.

Halyk Bank and Samsung Electronics debuted the new payment service Samsung Pay in Kazakhstan Jan. 21. For its customers participating in the open beta testing, the bank will provide a 10-percent bonus on every purchase made using the system. The bank is the first in the country to install the Samsung Pay app and connect its Visa or MasterCard bank cards. The payment service allows customers to pay for goods and services directly from their smartphones in any retail shops that accept cashless payments. The platform has three-level protection that ensures the security of payment transactions – fingerprint authentication, tokenisation and Samsung KNOX (a built-in security system that protects the smartphone from malicious attacks and continuously monitors possible vulnerabilities).

Kazakh-Slovak roundtable encourages increased bilateral economic cooperation

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh and Slovak officials hosted a business roundtable Jan. 21 in Nur-Sultan to discuss bilateral trade and economic cooperation as well as to sign memorandums of understanding.

“It should be said that more than 40 countries with Slovakian participation already work in Kazakhstan. ... Interest to our country is significant,” said Kazakh Ambassador to Slovakia Roman Vassilenko.

Vassilenko added that agriculture has the potential for increased cooperation as Slovakian interest in Kazakhstan grows.

“Agriculture, it should be noted, and the high-quality processing of agricultural products that are present in Slovakia, we are also interested in. Slovakia is interested



both in attracting our investments, and, naturally, in investing in our economy. And we very much hope that according to the results of today’s events, as well as the results of the signing of three memorandums of cooperation, our turnover will increase,” added Vassilenko.

Viktor Borecky, a department director at the Slovakian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said Slovakia sees potential in Kazakhstan due to its oil and uranium reserves as well as import potential.

“For us Kazakhstan is a very interesting country, because it de-

velops so rapidly in every direction. Also, from the perspective of a Slovakian import, it’s very important that Kazakhstan has oil reserves, uranium ore reserves and other natural resources. We also import. Our businessmen have a major interest towards Kazakhstan, they see opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation here. So many of them came here today. Personally, I worked here for four years, from 2007 to 2010, and I see that there are opportunities. It’s great that Kazakh companies are also starting to emerge in Slovakia,” said Borecky.

During the roundtable, Kazakh Invest and SARJO, the Agency for Investment and Trade Development of Slovakia, signed a memorandum of cooperation to exchange information and organise events. Also, a memorandum of cooperation and joint development was signed by Slovak Engul

electro energy equipment manufacturing company and Kazakh energy company Market Solutions.

The roundtable gathered Vassilenko, Kazakh Vice-Minister of Energy Sungat Yessimkhanov, Slovakian Ministry of Economy First State Secretary Vojtech Ferencz, Deputy Board Chair of Kazakh Invest Timur Tilinin, and more than 100 representatives of government and business sectors from Slovakia and Kazakhstan. The roundtable was organised by the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kazakh Invest.

Trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Slovakia exceeded \$26 million from January to September 2019. Since 2005, Slovakia’s foreign direct investment to Kazakhstan has exceeded \$20 million, reported Kazakh Invest press service.

EBRD invests more than \$761 million in 29 private, public sector projects in 2019

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) invested \$761 million in 29 private and public sector projects in Kazakhstan in 2019, reported the bank’s press service Jan. 17.

Support for small businesses is particularly important as the country moves to reform its economy and strengthen its private sector.

“This was another strong year for the bank in the country, when we supported strategically important projects. We are glad that a smooth political transition in Kazakhstan, helped improve investors’ confidence in the country and will allow us to build a strong basis for the continued cooperation,” said EBRD’s Head of Kazakhstan Agris Preimanis.

Most of the projects are involved in public infrastructure and renewable energy.

The EBRD approved the second phase of the \$332 million Kazakhstan Renewables Framework and a \$225 million loan for the comple-

tion of the Big Almaty Ring Road, a 66-kilometre bypass around Almaty.

The major transport infrastructure projects include the reconstruction of the Atyrau-Astrakhan road with \$211 million of investments and the Kurty-Kapshagai highway with \$89 million of investments to improve interregional connectivity and promote trade and economic prosperity.

The EBRD continues to support Kazakhstan as a regional leader in the development of renewable energy through the second phase of its renewable framework.

The framework programme supports the implementation of projects in solar, wind, hydro and biogas energy as well as electricity distribution and transmission projects. The projects are expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by at least 500,000 tonnes per year.

The renewables framework in Kazakhstan will help achieve its 3 percent renewable energy targets by 2020 and 50 percent by 2050 and fulfil its obligations as part of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Loans were provided for the

construction of a 100-megawatt solar power plant in the Zhambyl region (\$55 million), a 10-megawatt solar plant in the Zhanakorgan district (\$6.4 million) and a 50-megawatt solar power plant in Chulakkurgan (\$40.4 million) in the South Kazakhstan region, according to the release.

The bank also allocated loans to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and women entrepreneurs through local commercial banks including Forte Bank, Bank CenterCredit and KMF.

The bank provided \$25 million in loans to RG Brands, a manufacturer of food and beverages for the acquisition of new cooling display units with reduced electricity.

The EBRD continued its activities with local authorities in energy, transport and agribusiness sectors to improve Kazakhstan’s investment climate. The bank supported an auction scheme designed to promote competitive pricing and stimulate investments into renewables.

Overall, the EBRD has invested approximately \$9.3 billion in 269 projects in Kazakhstan.

Zhambyl entrepreneurs to implement 62 projects creating nearly 2,000 jobs

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Zhambyl Region entrepreneurs will be receiving more than 20 billion tenge (US\$52.88 million) to start 62 projects as part of the Economy of Simple Things state programme. The Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs estimates the projects should create 1,845 jobs.

The economic effect should reflect “an increase of production in the implementation of these projects – meaning an increase of production by 11.81 billion tenge (US\$31.3 million) annually and with tax revenues of approximately 1.73 billion tenge (US\$4.57 million),” Nagima Moldakhmetova, an expert with the Project Support Department of the chamber, told The Astana Times.

The Economy of Simple Things’ lower interest rate of 6 percent for seven years has expanded the list of potential borrowers among regional entrepreneurs. The government reduced the rate July 9 and added 45 new types of goods to the concessional financing, said Prime Minister Askar Mamin during the government meeting.

“This programme is very good for entrepreneurs,” said

Moldakhmetova. “If banks give 14-15 percent, then 6 percent, respectively, is a loan that is two times cheaper. It is beneficial for entrepreneurs to receive loans under this programme.”

In addition, “now the programme is being considered (to be extended) not for seven years, but for ten years. Therefore, large amounts are stretched for a period that is easier to pay,” she added.

Although there are currently no precise numbers to indicate when the projects will create a positive economic effect, the first returns should appear in a year.

“The project on the development of cattle breeding and animal husbandry can be implemented faster – throughout the year. Some have already received money, for example. They have already bought livestock and the returns from animals that they bought will obviously be in the next year,” said Moldakhmetova.

Most of the projects should show returns in a year, as “the majority of the projects are in the field of agriculture.”

The updated terms have also attracted furniture and food product manufacturers and educational service enterprises. The approved projects involve larger companies

such as QazStonePaper (corrugated cardboard), SuperPharm (medical devices) and Talas Investment Company (sodium cyanide).

“The main locomotive of lending in our region today is Talas Investment Company – the only enterprise in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) producing sodium cyanide,” Moldakhmetova told inform.kz.

The programme is also considering projects involving Agrospestroy (foam concrete blocks), Alel Agro (poultry farm), KazMeat-Korday (cattle breeding) and Kazphosphate (phosphate mining and processing plant).

The Zhambyl Region is the second largest in the country to implement the Economy of Simple Things programme, according to its press service. In 2019, banks approved 53 projects for 22.7 billion tenge (US\$60.28 million) of a possible 112 projects for 70.5 billion tenge (US\$186.40 million).

The region has 69,604 active small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), which represent 81.2 percent of the total enterprises registered in here. The number of operating SMEs increased 10.2 percent in 2019 and employed 124,685 individuals, a 7.8-percent increase.

Rich soil, increased European demand make Kazakhstan world’s largest flax oil producer

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Global flax imports have grown 1.7 times from 1.04 million tonnes in 2008 to 1.76 million tonnes in 2018. Kazakh farmers, with acres of the black soil needed for flax seeds, have conveniently supplied the growing demand.

The country produced 94,600 tonnes of flax in 2010. By 2018, production reached 719,000 tonnes and Kazakhstan became the world leader.

“As far as I know, this was a request from Europe, where linseed oil is also actively consumed for food and used in the production of, for example, paints, varnishes and linoleum,” said Kazakhstan Cereals and Oilseeds research bureau Director Viktor Aslanov, reported Forbes Kazakhstan.

“In 2010, when prices for all crops were at their peak, flax was bought from us for \$500 per tonne, while wheat was at \$120. After that, flax began to attract more attention; it became widespread in Kazakhstan and primarily in the North Kazakhstan Region, because there are black soils. Rapeseed, flax and other oilseeds require rich soils provided with all the elements,” he added.

In the 2017-2018 marketing year, Kazakhstan exported flax mainly to Belgium (194,300 tonnes), Poland (58,200 tonnes), Afghanistan (56,500 tonnes) and Russia (10,100 tonnes).

China has had the potential to join the major importer’s list in the few years. An agreement to supply flax to China was signed during Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s state visit to Beijing last September.

“This is a big event for the market,” said Aslanov. “The protocol enables our producers to export flax seeds to China without receiving additional documents from Chinese laboratories.”

Kazakh flaxseed oil is mainly produced for export. In 2018, the country sold 23,000 of 25,000 tonnes of produced oil. Europe and China are the main importers, he noted.

The nation’s flax producers, however, cautiously sell the oil. Europe imports oil in smaller quantities “because the transfer of linseed oil takes a long time and within 30 days, it turns into drying oil. China takes the most,” he added.

Kazakh flaxseed oil, however, could lose its competitive edge in the Chinese market, “which receives government subsidies for the production of flaxseed oil,” said Aslanov.

“China has a different consumption culture. For example, they love rapeseed oil; there is a press in each village and they themselves press the oil. It is considered premium quality, so the seeds will be bought for any money. When (foreign producers) bring the finished (product), people don’t know where they made the butter; they doubt it. Therefore, if we carry only oil, we will deprive a consumer of choice,” he noted.

The domestic market is even tougher because Kazakhs “do not have a culture of consumption of flaxseed oil. It is healthy, dietary, but you can’t add it only to salad; you can’t fry with it, so our consumer prefers vegetable oil, which our grandfathers took.

“Secondly, [there is] the question of money. When a customer approaches the shelf and sees that a litre of sunflower oil costs 430 tenge (\$1.14) and linseed oil costs 460 tenge (\$1.22) for 0.5 litres, the choice is obvious – they buy sunflower,” he added.

Kazakh flaxseed growers have demonstrated little interest in increasing flax processing.

“We are not sprayed – we are engaged in animal husbandry, decently sowing wheat, flax and rapeseed. It does not make sense to open small production. To put in a press, it must be good and work constantly, but we need to conquer the market. We could also supply a milk processing plant, but where is the market? There is no market,” said Poltavskoye Director Eltai Zikirin.

Flaxseeds have a long, 90-day growing season and can easily bear Northern Kazakhstan’s cold winters.

“We dump the flax; it can lie for a month or two and even remain in the snow until spring and nothing will happen to it. It does not lose quality,” he noted.

The attribute helps prices remain stable and “almost unchanged from year to year – 110,000-120,000 tenge (US\$291.50-US\$318) per tonne, while wheat prices are constantly dancing,” he added. Flax is also unpretentious, cheap to manufacture (40,000 tenge or US\$106 per tonne) and will grow and yield a crop in any year.

In addition, flax is used as a raw material to produce natural fibers. The linen fabric is very durable, does not rot and cannot be easily destroyed.

The quality causes problems in producing curly flax, as straw accumulates in large quantities and does not disintegrate. Many items can be processed from flax straw to turn it into a profitable business, said Zikirin.

“From it you can make a tow for construction purposes, technical and even medical cotton, heat-insulating boards. Now, BMW does not sheathe its cars (panels, doors) with plastic, but with a special linen sheet that does not break and does not injure a person in the event of an accident,” added Aslanov.

The European market is ready to buy flax straw products, but they need to be produced in Kazakhstan, which its farmers are not willing to do. The straw can be converted into useable products, but some businesspeople “will put up a slab plant here, helping farmers who buy flax to flail,” he noted.

“In winter, farmers with flocks can make primary material and bring it to the factory. The prospects in terms of production are great,” he said.

EDITORIAL&OPINION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Kazakhstan to be at centre of Fourth Industrial Revolution

The World Economic Forum last week, as always, generated plenty of news and controversy. The main theme this year was the threat of climate change, although the discussions also underlined that powerful voices remain who believe the dangers are, at the least, exaggerated.

But the week showed that many businesses and investors are not waiting for more evidence. They are instead already altering plans and priorities both to reduce their own impact on the climate and to protect their operations as well as communities from changes already underway.

What was also clear was the essential role that innovation and technological advance must play in reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the impact of the climate changes already happening. Without such developments, it is impossible to see how the necessary steps can be taken without prosperity and living standards being badly hit.

It was against this background that the agreement signed at Davos between the Government of Kazakhstan, the Astana International Financial Centre and the WEF to develop a new regional innovation hub in Nur-Sultan had added significance. The announcement confirms Kazakhstan's determination to play its full role in helping find the technological solutions to global challenges, such as climate change but also to seize the incredible opportunities that are opening up.

The aim of the new centre, that will be based at the AIFC, is to develop the framework to shape what has become known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Experts predict that the technological advances of the next few years – and, importantly, the way they will work together – will have a more profound impact than the past revolutions driven by the harnessing of steam, of electricity and, in more recent years, computers and the internet.

Professor Klaus Schwab, the founder of WEF who first coined the phrase Fourth Industrial Revolution, has forecast that it is this fusion of technology and blurring of lines between the physical, digital and biological sphere which will make the transformation so fast and extensive.

We can't know how these connections will play out, but we do know that no aspect of our lives will be unchanged.

Nur-Sultan's Fourth Industrial Revolution Centre – one of a series across the world – would give Kazakhstan a major role in shaping this revolution. The initial aims are to help create the right policy and regulatory framework to encourage innovations in areas such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, robotics, data policies as well as the Internet of Things and smart city development. It is hoped it will quickly become an important regional centre, drawing in governments, businesses, research institutes and civic society from across Central Asia.

Kazakhstan has, of course, long grasped the importance of technology to the economy and increasingly to society. First President Nursultan Nazarbayev put it at the forefront of his government's programmes. And well before the term Fourth Industrial Revolution was well-known, he was using it in his speeches and urging the country to both prepare for it. This urgency is shared by his successor, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, and the new government.

Major new investment is also being made in digital connectivity and skills to ensure the economy, state services and citizens are ready for the opportunities ahead. Kazakhstan has estimated that the introduction of digital technologies in agriculture alone could see an increase of up to 50 percent in productivity and decrease of 20 percent in costs. The benefits of getting this right will be enormous.

Such rapid change will, however, also inevitably brings challenges. The largest may well be that inequality in wealth and influence – already a major problem across the world – will, without action, grow. It is a concern that President Tokayev has already made clear he recognises and is determined to prevent.

He also knows that the best way to tackle these concerns and seize the opportunities this incredible marriage of technologies will bring to raise living standards and find solutions to challenges, such as climate change, is to try to shape the coming revolution. And that is exactly what Kazakhstan has shown it is determined to do.

EU and Central Asia: new opportunities to work together for a green future

By Josep Borell Fontelles

On 28 January 2020, friends from Central Asia, Afghanistan and the European Union will gather in Berlin for a conference organised by the German Foreign Ministry, entitled "Green Central Asia". I was glad to accept the invitation and join foreign ministers from the region, for two main reasons.

First, to underline how urgent the challenge of tackling climate change is and how much we need to mobilise everyone to address it. The science is clear: we are facing a true climate crisis. Climate change is one of the biggest geopolitical challenges we face. It poses problems of redistribution, inside the EU and beyond, and is a driver of instability and migratory pressures. It creates problems of social justice, raises tensions and poses a threat to human rights. Tackling these multi-faceted threats cannot be left only to climate specialists. It must be at the centre of our foreign policy.

Europe is ready to lead the global fight against climate change. In December 2019, we adopted the "EU Green Deal", which commits the EU to becoming carbon neutral by 2050. But the EU is only responsible for 9% of global emissions, so we need others to join us.

The second reason was that the conference was a good opportunity to reconfirm the EU's commitment to strengthen cooperation with Central Asia. In fact, relations have entered a new phase. Last year EU Foreign Ministers adopted a new Strategy on Central Asia with the specific aim to step up our engagement with the region so that it becomes a more resilient, prosperous, and interconnected space. We see huge potential for greater regional cooperation in Central Asia, a view which the leaders of Central Asia share as they themselves



Photo credit: ec.europa.eu

stated at their summit last November in Tashkent.

Climate change is a top priority for our partnership, as Central Asia is particularly affected. Over the past three decades, average annual temperatures in the region have already risen by 0.5 degrees Celsius and droughts and water scarcity have disrupted entire ecosystems. The disappearance of the Aral Sea is a spectacular illustration of the negative consequences of climate change. This is not "just" an environmental problem: it is a catastrophe for entire communities who live on its former shores.

The EU can offer a genuinely regional and cross-border approach to Central Asia's challenges – unlike some of your other partners. We have experiences to share. For example, our emissions trading system can help regions adjust, as they move away from coal, and we can share our know-how in clean, renewable energy sources. We also have the means to help, as the world's foremost climate finance donor. Together with our member states, we provide over 40% of the world's public climate finance.

Central Asia already benefits from a range of EU-funded projects. One of our main regional initiatives is the EU-Central Asia Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation, established in 2009, with the next meeting of its Working Group scheduled for 12-13 February in Brussels.

Another key EU initiative is the Central Asia Water and Energy Programme (CAWEP) which promotes regional cooperation on energy and water security. This programme has facilitated dialogue among Central Asian governments on common water resources management such as the Aral Sea basin, through support to regional organisations such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). The next phase of this programme will see the inclusion of Afghanistan, a key riparian state of the Amu Darya.

The EU has also engaged for almost ten years in efforts to decontaminate uranium legacy sites in Central Asia. It invested €41 million to support plans with the Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on seven high priority uranium legacy sites of the Ferghana valley, the "breadbasket" of the region.

I am looking forward to the Conference 'Water for Sustainable Development' to be organised by the Government of Tajikistan in June this year in Dushanbe. We hope the Conference will contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and that it will draw high-level political attention to the growing challenge presented by water management issues. To promote transboundary water cooperation, the EU encourages the countries of the Central Asia who have not yet done so – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, in particular – to join the Helsinki Water Convention of 1992.

During my mandate, I will do everything I can to scale up global cooperation on climate action. The EU is ready to do its part at home and work with partners around the world, including those that already feel the dramatic effects of climate change such as in Central Asia.

The author is EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP).

Tokayev's visit to UAE to boost cooperation, says envoy

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's first visit to the United Arab Emirates, which is also his first visit to the Middle East as head of state, will boost cooperation between the countries, Kazakh Ambassador to the UAE Madiyar Menilbekov tells The Astana Times.

The visit "will allow the discussion of the current state of bilateral relations and will give impetus to the development of mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas between the two fraternal countries," Menilbekov said prior to the President's visit.

According to him, there is "huge unaccomplished potential and prospects for further expansion of bilateral cooperation in completely new sectors of the economy."

UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan invited Tokayev to visit in his June letter congratulating Tokayev on his election victory.

Kazakhstan and the UAE have a history of more than 27 years of diplomatic relations. During



Madiyar Menilbekov

those years, "tremendous work has been done to develop trade, economic and investment partnerships and expand cultural and humanitarian ties," Menilbekov said.

According to him, there is "huge unaccomplished potential and prospects for further expansion of bilateral cooperation in completely new sectors of the economy."

This can be seen from "the steps taken by the two states to introduce the latest technologies, to develop digitisation while entering the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution," he said.

"The United Arab Emirates intends to develop mutually beneficial and long-term cooperation with Kazakhstan. Appropriate conditions have been created for this," he said.

Cooperation with the resource-rich UAE should benefit Kazakhstan, as the Emirates are also known as a "rapidly developing modern tourist, transport, logistics and production hub in the Middle East, which has taken an active course towards diversifying its economy along with the introduction of the latest technologies," the envoy said. "The UAE supports Kazakhstan's ongoing

domestic and foreign policy with its peaceful initiatives," he said.

The UAE is a member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and regularly sends representatives to the triennial Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, both Kazakh initiatives. Also, the Emirates have supported Kazakhstan's initiative to establish the Islamic Food Security Organisation (IFSO) under the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

"Abu Dhabi, like Nur-Sultan, has always advocated respect for the basic principles of interstate relations, such as non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty. Moreover, Kazakhstan has no disagreements with the United Arab Emirates on any issues. Our views on topical issues on the international agenda often coincide," he said.

In addition, the two countries have a lot of cultural similarities that might ease the negotiation and cooperation processes.

"The nomadic way of life that our ancestors led over the centuries, common spiritual, cultural, national values and much more serve as a bridge connecting the two peoples," he said.

In honour of Tokayev's visit and Kazakh poet and thinker Abai Kunanbayev's 175th anniversary, Abu Dhabi's Manarat al-Saadiyat Cultural Centre will present Kazakhfilm's "Kunanbai" and "Abai" feature films. In addition, as part of the Days of Kazakh Cinema in the UAE, the city will also run the films "Kazakh Khanate. Golden Throne" and "The Leader's Way."

Dubai will host EXPO 2020 in December, which "will bring together a record number of participating countries from around the world," Menilbekov noted. Kazakhstan and 191 countries have confirmed their participation, and work on the Kazakh pavilion has begun. Kazakhstan will also celebrate its national day with the participation of a high-level delegation during the exhibition.

Kazakhstan's First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, and Emirati President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan first met in 1998 in Abu Dhabi.

Nazarbayev "played a key role both in the formation of modern Kazakhstan with its active, balanced foreign policy, and in establishing and creating a solid base for bilateral relations with the countries of the Arab world," the envoy said. "Even then, many observers saw the amazing closeness of the views and ideas of Nursultan Nazarbayev and Sheikh Zayed, their willingness and desire to actively develop bilateral contacts."

Over the following years, Nazarbayev also met with the current Emirati president, the vice president, the prime minister, the ruler of Dubai and the crown prince of Abu Dhabi.

"As a witness to all those meetings over the past 12 years, which took place in a very friendly atmosphere, I can say that it was always easy for the leaders of the two countries to find a 'common language,'" he said.

"Since then, the economic, investment and investment partnership, based on mutual respect and an understanding of the priorities and interests of the two countries,

has been the locomotive of Kazakh-Emirati relations. Thanks to the signed Agreement on the Encouragement and Reciprocal Protection of Investments, long-term stability for investors is ensured," he added.

To date, Kazakhstan and the UAE have "a solid legal base, which consists of more than 100 documents regulating almost all areas of bilateral cooperation," he said. "The main ones are agreements on trade and economic cooperation, on the promotion and mutual protection of investments, on avoidance of double taxation, on the transfer of convicted persons and on assistance in civil and commercial matters."

The UAE's investments in the Kazakh economy have exceeded \$2.1 billion.

The countries are currently working together to build the Abu Dhabi Plaza multifunctional

complex in Nur-Sultan, which will be the tallest building in Central Asia and a "symbol of the strong friendship between the peoples of Kazakhstan and the UAE" The building, worth \$1.2 billion, is scheduled to be completed in July.

"The United Arab Emirates remains the main and most attractive destination for investment in the region. However, the Emirates, having huge capital, actively invest abroad. Amid the rapidly changing security situation in the region, the Emirates remain a kind of 'island of stability' in the midst of a stormy sea of modern challenges and threats in the Middle East," the envoy said.

In addition, from March 10, 2018, the countries eliminated the need for visas for stays of 30 days or fewer and doubled tourist flow to Kazakhstan and increased business activities.

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Editor-in-Chief
The Astana Times

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BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Nazarbayev University scientists develop mobile app for coeliac disease awareness

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – Nazarbayev University (NU) scientists have developed CeliacTest, the first mobile application with a short questionnaire that can identify the risk of a person having coeliac disease, a genetically predisposed immune-mediated gluten intolerance. The creators want to increase the currently low awareness of the common disease that can lead to a severe health condition.

CeliacTest has no analogues, as it is the first app to complete the risk assessment, connect people with the disease and provide thorough information on gluten-free providers in Kazakhstan, said Aizhan Kozhakhmetova, a researcher, biology teaching assistant and the idea’s main developer, in an exclusive interview with The Astana Times.

She noted doctors and researchers “highly appreciated” and “have already expressed their interest in using the app in their research” after her presentation at Astana-Gastro 2019, the 14th international scientific and practical conference held Nov. 1-2 in the capital.

If a person is determined to be high-risk based on the questionnaire, the app provides recommendations for blood tests. People can gain comprehensive information on coeliac disease,



L-R: Nurdaulet Kenges, Aizhan Kozhakhmetova and Korlan Zhumabekova.

related conditions, diagnosis and treatment.

Clinical scientists from the charity Coeliac UK composed the questionnaire for adults using evidence-based clinical guidelines and proved its accuracy. Kozhakhmetova, together with a team of Kazakh scientists, composed the list of queries for children.

The app is also useful for people diagnosed with the disease, as

“strict compliance with the gluten-free diet is essential for the recovery and well-being of individuals with coeliac disease,” she said. The built-in directory makes it easy to find gluten-free restaurants and supermarkets in Kazakh cities, as well as information about doctors and medical centres. Users can also explore the app’s forum and gain access to an online medical consultant.

ling bureaucratic procedures. In addition, even the existence of such a society “does not guarantee that all areas of our country will benefit from it,” she noted.

As a result, she devised a mobile app that eliminates the paperwork and accessibility problems “for everyone in Kazakhstan and even beyond,” she said.

“Through the CeliacTest app, I wanted to increase awareness about the condition and promote early diagnosis of coeliac disease, as well as support diagnosed people and foster further research,” she added.

NU computer science graduate students Nurdaulet Kenges and Korlan Zhumabekova volunteered to convert Kozhakhmetova’s idea into reality and made it available for free from the Play Store. The team worked on the app with enthusiasm and without funding.

The team will continue updating the glossary and list of medical professionals and services. It is currently only available in Russian, but they plan to add English and Kazakh versions. iOS users should expect to find the app in the Apple Store.

CeliacTest will also have a separate section for scientific news and publish information on new research findings, as well as material about on-going local and international research projects.

“I hope that this will increase the popularity of science among clinicians, as well as assist re-

searchers to recruit patients into their research,” said Kozhakhmetova.

The project is seeking to promote the app through cooperation with medical professionals and healthcare organisations. The team may be contacted at celiactestinfo@gmail.com.

The app is limited to a risk assessment. For an accurate diagnosis, one should see a doctor and take tests.

“The app gives a chance to those people with latent coeliac disease to be diagnosed [in a timely way] and start treatment earlier to avoid potential adverse consequences. Doctors can also use the app to assess the risks of their patients, which is the first step to accurate diagnosis,” she noted.

Early detection and prevention of coeliac disease can save a person from “gut mucosal layer atrophy and corruption of absorption of nutrients. Also, it can cause debilitating problems with bones, thyroid, skin and other organs,” said Kozhakhmetova.

“It is a quite common condition. Around one percent of the population suffers from it; however, it was estimated that about 90 percent of cases still remain undetected and it takes people eight years on average to get the right diagnosis. This happens because of its frequent atypical presentation and ability to mask [itself] under different symptoms and health conditions,” she added.

AIFC to establish Fourth Industrial Revolution affiliation centre

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – As part of the 50th annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos (Switzerland), the Kazakh government, Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC) and WEF signed a tripartite letter of intent to establish a Fourth Industrial Revolution affiliation centre this year based in the AIFC, reported inbusiness.kz Jan. 23.

The centre will bring together Central Asian government agencies and business and industrial partners to develop regulatory standards to introduce innovative technologies. In the first stage, the centre seeks to develop projects in areas such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics and smart cities, as well as data policy.

“The opening of the affiliation centre will also strengthen Ka-

zakhstan’s role as one of the world leaders committed to innovation and the introduction of new technologies important for society. The global network of the Fourth Industrial Revolution launched in 2017 is represented by centres in China, Columbia, India, Israel, Japan, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and the United States,” according to the AIFC press service.

Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin, AIFC Managing Director Kairat Kelimbetov and WEF President Børge Brende signed the letter of intent.

“We see rapid technological changes in products and processes and the opening of the affiliation centre in Kazakhstan will allow our innovation ecosystem to influence international politics, principles and regulation in the management of new technologies and will help form the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” said Kelimbetov.

Fourth Industrial Revolution Network Centre head and Managing Director Murat Sonmez emphasised the three parties should move rapidly.

“The speed and scale of change in the Fourth Industrial Revolution means that we must act quickly. If business, government and a wider civil society can unite, Kazakhstan can become an innovation centre in the [Central Asian] region,” he said.

AIFC, located on a territory in the capital with a special tax, currency and visa regime and using English common law, was created to attract investment to the economy. The centre began registering companies in January 2018. It plays a pivotal role as an international centre for business and finance, connecting the economies of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Europe, the Middle East, Mongolia and West China.

Third Women’s Business Forum in Shymkent gathers region’s female entrepreneurs

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Female entrepreneurs in Shymkent work primarily in light industry, services, beauty, trade and catering industries, Chair of the Kazakh Business Women’s Council and the Atameken Business Chamber presidium member Lyazzat Ramazanova said Jan. 23 to inbusiness.kz.

“We have 600 business entities in this industry in the country, and 90 percent are women-run businesses. Twelve of them are large, about 26 medium-sized factories, and the rest are all individual entrepreneurs. We travelled around 12 regions, visited about 80 enterprises, told them that we will make films and write articles about them, we will promote their products for the competition. But they did not believe us, because the woman, unfortunately, relies only on herself,” said Ramazanova about the recent competition for the light industry female entrepreneurs and the problems organisers encountered.

Ramazanova added that in Shymkent, 52 percent of the population are women, and 42 percent of all entrepreneurs are females. Ramazanova added the problem of female entrepreneurs accepting help was in the confidence gap between males and females, so the project aimed to give women more resources to be able to expand with.

“Come to the male business community and say that now they will give you state support, that you have a soft loan, and they quickly have the business machine turned on in their head: collect free balances and tighten up the turnover. But this is not about women. A woman clearly knows that she must first pay taxes, second – to pay a loan, third – a communal apartment, and only after that will she think about whether she can invest some money in production. Therefore, this project was free for them. Sponsored money attracted everything – this is purely an initiative,” added Ramazanova.

One of the competition finalists said the competitive environment of the competition created posi-



Photo credit: inbusiness.kz

tive incentives for the project development.

“Although I am not a sports person, but when such people surround you, I am simply forced to create a project, and I like it. Basically, we have small orders, ranging from 10 to 50 units in the size range. Among the customers there are the school of rhythmic gymnastics Aliya Yussupova, the martial arts school of the city of Tashkent ‘Soaring Dragon’, the karate federation of the region. They order individually,” said businesswoman and save file creator of Marito Sport sport wear brand Margarita Manigulova.

Despite the small scale of the production, Manigulova has large ambitions, including submitting an application for the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation recently.

“Recently, we submitted an application to the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation to create our own name toy from the Marito Sport brand – this is Irbis Tengri. We’re waiting for answer. We plan to send 10 percent of the sales of this toy to the Wildlife Protection Fund. This is our chip,” added Manigulova.

As the Business Women’s Council of Shymkent Chair Alma Arkhabayeva said, the key problems of Kazakh entrepreneurs are the lack of funding, lack of knowledge and inability to manage a business.

“Not enough maturity. Entrepreneurs have not been taught at institutes for five years. These

people woke up in the morning, saw that a neighbour bought a jeep, and decided I also want. Unfortunately, 95 percent of business at the start-up stage closes – this is official statistics. This year Atameken did a great job. I saw competent trainers who trained four thousand people in a short time, in eight months. Now they have taken the initiative to accompany, lead women, unite them. Very often, at the first stage, we need motivation to just kick. These motivators should be so that they say ‘I passed, and you can!’ This is our mission,” said Arkhabayeva.

Arkhabayeva added that the council plans to open a resource centre in Shymkent to address the aforementioned challenges.

“We are going to open a resource centre this month, and we want to collaborate and create four cooperatives: this is beauty – they received a lot of money for it, these are Namaskhan shops that offer religious clothes and attributes. Sewing separately, and, we think, the baking shop. Everyone loves something to bake, but I believe that such things should not happen at home, because we do not know the sanitary condition, conditions. They must unite in cooperatives, buy stoves, stack their stoves and produce something worthy so that they have orders. I am for this. Of course, we say that we do not need checks, but there we risk health, ordering,” said Arkhabayeva.



The Nur Alem, Kazakhstan’s national pavilion during EXPO 2017, continues to serve as a museum. The former expo grounds serve as the venue for the AIFC and several other institutions.

BUSINESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Tchibo Kazakhstan launches first coffee shops with convenience stores, promotes green business ideas



L-R: Serik Irsaliyev and Saniya Irsaliyeva, Kanipa Nurgalieva, Kamiliya Serikova and her spouse Iskakov Adilkhan and their son Amirkhan Nurakhmetov.

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Tchibo Kazakhstan has opened its unique three-in-one model of coffee and coffee machines/home goods/coffee shops in the capital and Almaty. The company promotes family business values and is moving towards sustainable retailing.

Co-founder Kamiliya Serikova, who lived in Europe for 12 years, started the business with her mother Saniya Irsaliyeva and sisters Leila Irsaliyeva and Aizhan Iskakova upon returning home. Although she initially doubted the possible success of a family business, she learned during an intern-

ship in Germany that 80 percent of local enterprises are family-owned businesses which have existed for 200–300 years.

“The board of directors of family-owned businesses in Germany consists not only of people from the family and they also play decision-making roles. I guess this is the secret to the success of their business,” she said in an interview for this story.

They wanted to create a cosy European-style café in the heart of Central Asia and show locals a new way of family shopping.

“There’s a stereotype that if there’s a high-quality item, it must be expensive. As a student, I always purchased gifts for my rel-

atives and friends at Tchibo store, as they offered good products at affordable prices. Then we got an idea to open a coffee shop in Kazakhstan to offer quality goods and quality coffee,” she said.

Working with their partners, the company was able to open its first coffee shop Oct. 12, 2018.

“When we conducted market research, at that time none of the coffee shops in Kazakhstan used 100-percent Arabica coffee beans. Tchibo uses only 100-percent Arabica coffee beans, which are grown at high elevations. It is difficult to plant, care and harvest this sort of coffee bean but it is considered to be of high quality and better for health, as it



has a smaller percentage of caffeine than Robusta. Arabica is considered to have a bitter taste, but, in fact, the Tchibo company uses special slow roasting. Due to this fact, a very mild taste is obtained,” she noted.

Tchibo developed a menu taking into account local lifestyle. The café offers not only desserts, but also snacks and children’s drinks. There’s a kid’s table with toys and colouring books at the coffee shop in MEGA Silk Way in the capital and MEGA Centre Alma-Ata in Almaty.

The company originally focused on the family concept, but when it opened a shop, it realised its customers were more kinaesthetic.

“People like our organic cotton, especially men,” said Serikova.

The company uses organic cotton for clothing and household goods. Tchibo is also a distributor of organic cotton grown in fields where chemicals are not used.

“We mostly develop our business through business networking and personal branding. We attend various events, work with bloggers and organise various master classes in Tchibo. Users can purchase our items via Instagram. Delivery is free throughout Kazakhstan for purchases worth more than 15,000 tenge (US\$40),” she said.

The company conducted market research and began cooperating with the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). It is now developing an online store with the bank’s support.

Tchibo plans to offer bean-to-cup coffee machines and expand its range of products. It also soon intends to supply coffee to other coffee houses, as its blends are becoming more popular among locals.

“We are for green business. Our suppliers also choose a conscious approach in production. We offer a 10-percent discount for customers with their own reusable cup for keeping one more cup out of landfills. We recycle paper and plastic,” she said.

“We are delighted to invite new customers to try our high-quality coffee and we are pleased to see customers returning to us. We are also open to proposals for cooperation; we are happy to receive feedback from our guests,” she added.

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Short documentaries portray self-made Kazakhs in Europe and China

B2

CULTURE

National Museum holds designer meeting, fashion shows

B3

SPORTS

Anastasia Gorodko wins two dual moguls golds at FIS European Cup in Switzerland

B7

Tokayev encourages youth to take innovative approach to government



By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said Jan. 15 at a meeting with representatives of the Presidential Youth Personnel Reserve that the country needs civil servants who are not afraid to take responsibility and make innovative and effective decisions.

The initiative to create the presidential personnel reserve was one of the key issues of To-

kayev’s election programme. This year, 300 people were selected for the Presidential Youth Personnel Reserve. Overall, 13,000 people applied for the participation in the personnel reserve.

“You demonstrated high-level competencies and a sincere desire to work for the government. I’m ready to listen to your opinion and present my vision of the tasks facing the personnel reserve,” he said.

The President expects from each

representative new ideas and productive work that will help the country’s development.

“You will be appointed to the state bodies and national companies in the future. Fifty-five people included in the reserve have already received new positions,” he said.

This year, 100 civil servants will also be appointed.

Tokayev called on young people, regardless of their position, to make their own contribution to governmental work with small

changes in a specific industry, region, city and village.

“A new generation of leaders including you will come to power. You should be ready. You should have the necessary competencies and knowledge. Our youth should be ready for a new historical stage in the development of the country. Knowledge and competencies should be above ambitions. And not vice versa, as it often happens,” Tokayev said.

Continued on Page B2

National Museum holds designer meeting, fashion shows

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Eurasian Designers Union held an open meeting Jan. 15-18 at the Kazakh National Museum, reported the museum press service. Participants were involved in seminars and lectures by renowned designers and architects, saw a fashion show by both professional and young designers and received a guided tour of the museum.

“The tendencies we discussed during the seminar were as follows. The union will continue facilitating the development of the design in all Kazakhstan’s regions. Everybody, from every region, from remote cities, came to the event. Next is ethno design, national design and applied art. We supported it, awarded the designers. Third – the youth design. Because the Year

of Youth ended, we awarded not only professional and well-known designers, but also young talents. Fourth is Kazakh design abroad. There are many designers working in France, Poland, the Netherlands and Turkey,” union Chair and Kazakh culture figure Yermek As-sylkhanov told The Astana Times.

Designers such as Armenian art coordinator Naira Tumanyan, International Art Fund President Khassen Abayev and art Ph.D. Yulia Mazina attended the event.

Kairolla Abishev, the Russian National Academy of Design and Eurasian Designers Union member who has designed costumes for Kazakh singers Dimash Kudaibergen and Yerzhan Maksim, spoke about the nation’s design achievements abroad and staged a fashion show of his works.

Continued on Page B3

Russian TV channel releases documentary about Denis Ten

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Russian television channel Match TV released the documentary “Denis Ten. Thirteen” Dec. 23, 2019 about the Kazakh figure skater, reported zakon.kz. The film was written and produced by sport journalists Sergei Railyan and Konstantin Stolbovski.

The documentary gathered videos from the Ten family’s personal archives and interviewed Russian Olympic and world figure skating champion Alexei Yagudin, Kazakh world weightlifting champion Ilya Ilyin and Kazakh singer Roza Rymbayeva, among others.

“It is very difficult, it turns out, to make a small film about Denis Ten. He lived his 25 years in a way that could fit a whole era. Try shooting a short metre about the Renaissance, for example. You will definitely have difficulties. You will quickly realise that you cannot embrace the immensity,” said the documentary’s opening words.

The tragedy of Ten’s premature death moved Stolbovski and Kazakh newspaper “Caravan” reporter Railyan to make the 50-minute documentary in his memory.

The idea for the film appeared in March and took shape close to the first anniversary of Ten’s death in July, said Railyan.

“The idea came to my friend, sports journalist of Match TV Konstantin Stolbovski. He now works in Moscow, but he was born and raised in Almaty. Here, he began his journalistic career. No wonder he took Denis Ten’s death very deeply,” he told The Astana Times.

Stolbovski spoke about Ten’s death in an interview with “Caravan.”

“When Denis was killed in my native Almaty last summer, I sat in my kitchen in Moscow, poured a glass of vodka and cried. I recall the day when the tragedy with Denis Ten happened. I worked at the time with ‘Arguments and Facts’ (newspaper) and was responsible for the sports section on the portal. Naturally, I was given the task of collecting information about what happened. However, unexpectedly for myself, I fell into a stupor. It seemed as though that for 40 years in the profession little could really excite me. My fingers refused to print, my head was completely empty. I just could not work and went home,” he said.

Continued on Page B7

Once in KELT, forever in KELT – Kazakhstan’s first English language theatre

By Nurdana Adyilkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – KELT, the country’s first English language theatre, was founded in 2001 in Almaty by the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economic and Strategic Research (KIMEP) University. It provides an opportunity for non-professional actors to receive professional-level stage training and experience and teaches discipline, integrity, time management and leadership skills, said artistic director Jessica Lewis in an exclusive interview for this story.

“We also provide a community for people. We are like a family and are invested in one another’s lives,” she added. “KELT is an organisation that is more focused on the people rather than the product; developing people from their character to theatre skills. All the while, we pride ourselves on doing excellent and quality work.”

The theatre adheres to the slogan “Once in KELT, forever in KELT.” Anyone who has ever been in a KELT production is part of its “family.”

Directors hold new auditions for each show. Casting is open to anyone, not just KIMEP students. Actors are not required to have previous experience, but need to commit to intensively working five nights per week.

“Everyone is welcome at the auditions – from those with extensive theatre experience to those who have never set foot on a stage before,” said Lewis.

KELT is distinguished by its diversity and includes people from various nationalities and backgrounds.

“We have had actors who’ve

worked in oil companies, big ten companies; we had a pilot once, a TV producer, circus artists, accountants, English teachers,” she said.

Some actors studying marketing or business decided instead to pursue acting and several subsequently received a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Acting and Film.

KELT originated from KIMEP students’ interest in opening an English language theatre. In response to the request, the Dean of Student Affairs offered the leadership to Nathan Fleming, an American teacher with a theatre background, who gladly agreed to become its director.

In 2006, Fleming organised a summer tour across Kazakhstan to celebrate the theatre’s fifth anniversary and invited two American actors, including Lewis. She spent four years studying theatre at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, then received her MFA in Acting from the University of Iowa.

“I spent two months in Almaty working with KELT and traveling around Kazakhstan. It was my first time outside of the United States,” she said.

At that time, Lewis had just received her Master’s degree and intended to pursue an acting career in the United States. The summer in Kazakhstan changed her plans forever.

“I fell in love with Kazakhstan, the people and KELT. I returned to the States and a few months later, Nathan contacted me and asked if I would come back in a year to direct for KELT while he was scheduled to be in the States for a five-month stint,” she said.

A year later, Lewis began directing KELT works. When Fleming returned to Kazakhstan, he announced

he was moving to Atyrau and asked her to become the permanent director.

In 2011, American teacher Laura Pacini moved to Kazakhstan to teach at an international school and joined KELT as a co-director. She received her Bachelor’s Degree in Theatre Education at the University of Northern Colorado and has an extensive background in film production.

KELT usually has two main productions each year surrounded by smaller projects. The cast rehearses two-three months for a production, assembling four-six nights per week and three hours each time. All performances and rehearsals are conducted in English.

During rehearsals, actors do extensive vocal and body warm-ups and are taught to analyse their character and script to bring as much truth to the role as possible.

“We strive to create an atmosphere of safety where actors are willing to take risks, go outside their comfort zones and be vulnerable,” said Lewis.

One of the theatre’s popular and meaningful productions, “Play-back,” is characterised as “social theatre.” It involves improvisation where the actors “play back” stories told by the audience. The actors listen intently and empathetically without planning or speaking, then immediately replay the story using only instruments and different-coloured fabrics and chairs. By presenting the essence of what they heard, they show the audience that their stories are worthy of being made into stage art.

“It is a form of theatre that unites everyone and says ‘the story of one is the story of all of us,’” she added.

The actors train in this form of im-

provisation throughout the year and occasionally add new members to the playback cast. It is a type of theatre that they can perform anywhere and at any given time.

One of the most popular KELT performances was spring 2017’s “Cinderella.” The work, presented at the Schoolchildren Palace in the capital and sponsored by the city akimat (administration), was the first known licensed Broadway production presented in Kazakhstan and attracted more than 4,000 audience members.

Cinderella was played by Abby Gilbert and the Prince by music channel Gakku TV General Producer Timur Balymbetov. They were invited to the capital to appear on Nurlan Koyanbayev’s late night show.

KELT will present “These Shining Lives” by Melanie Marnich April 24-26 at KIMEP. The play tells the true story of four women working in an American factory in the 1920s by painting watches with radium – a substance which glows in the dark and is highly radioactive.

Lewis noted the play illuminates the danger working women had faced in the early part of the 20th century due to companies and management turning a blind eye to life-threatening factory issues. The women’s courage to stand up against hostile corporate money-making machines as well as criticism from the public paved the path for safer work conditions and protocols. The United States and the world continue to experience the positive outcomes of their brave actions.

Pacini will direct the show and casting will be held Jan. 30-31 at KIMEP University. Interested candidates may check the theatre’s Instagram account @insta_kelt or Facebook page @kzkelt.

THINGS TO WATCH & PLACES TO GO

ASTANA OPERA

Jan. 31 at 7 p.m.

Romantique, concert

Feb. 2 at 5 p.m.

Aida, opera

Feb. 5 at 7 p.m.

Choir concert

Feb. 8 at 5 p.m.

Enchanting France, concert

Feb. 9 at 7 p.m.

Peter and the Wolf, concert

Feb. 12 at 7 p.m.

From Solo to Quartet, concert

BARYS ARENA

Jan. 30 at 7.30 p.m.

HC Barys – HC Neftekhimik Nizhnekamsk

Feb. 1 at 5 p.m.

HC Barys – HC Avangard Omsk

ASTANA BALLET

Feb. 8, 9 at 6 p.m.

Cinderella, ballet

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Short documentaries portray self-made Kazakhs in Europe and China



Kazakh travel blogger Kuat Bolatov.

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh travel blogger Kuat Bolatov has produced short documentaries about the lives of self-made Kazakhs living in Austria, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as China. The aim is to motivate others and convey the message that everything is possible.

“The project has a social character; no one earns anything and I just wanted to make such a film,” he said in an exclusive interview for this story.

The idea for the documentaries originated from his first trip abroad at age 26.

“(It was) the first independent trip for a long time and something unusual... I rode a bicycle in seven countries of Europe, with a tent, a burner and a sleeping bag,” he noted.

His friends recommended visiting their relatives or friends living in Europe. For half of his 32-day trip, Bolatov stayed with those who agreed to put him for a night. His hosts were not only

Kazakhs, but individuals from Bulgaria, Germany and the Netherlands.

Bolatov was surprised Kazakhs living in Europe are unknown in their native land.

“Those guys speak several languages, work in cool companies or study at cool universities. They are self-made from the regions,” he said.

Bolatov was asked to make a video presentation about his trip and present a talk in the capital. Rather than compete with the numerous videos about Europe’s beauty, he decided to tell the stories of people living there. He used a cellphone camera to record the answers to his questions, cobbling them into a seven-minute video.

Some audience members recognised the interviewees as people who once lived in their city or village and the response inspired him to devote his next trip to making a film about Kazakhs living abroad. He chose the United Kingdom as his destination, where he again travelled by bicycle and recorded interviews. The film consists of seven stories.

Bolatov later filmed a documentary about four Kazakhs living in Prague, Vienna and Zurich. Last year, he went to China for a similar project, telling five stories.

The underlying message connecting the tales is that one can achieve high goals if he or she works hard and never gives up.

One of the characters, Farkhad Bolatov, is a talented musician from the small town of Yereimentau who received the opportunity to study at London’s Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

“There is no secret (of success). You just need to work; you need to want to do something, go beyond this box of certain circumstances and try to do more, work more, believe in yourself,” he said.

Another character, Madina Karsakbayeva, received her Erasmus Mundus Master’s degree in Inclusive Education.

“It happened that I was born with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, but it never stopped me on the path to achieving my desires and the education that I always aspired to,” she said.

More than 50,000 Kazakh volunteers at work in the country

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The practice of volunteering in Kazakhstan is developing rapidly, Chair of the Civil Society Affairs Committee of the Ministry of Information and Social Development Aliya Galimova said in an interview with primeminister.kz.

To date, there are more than 200 volunteer organisations, twice as many as existed in 2017. Currently, more than 50,000 people are involved in the volunteer movement.

Klub 28 Petel members have knitted more than 130,000 sets of clothes for babies, helping more than 2,000 people in all regions of the country. This movement has spread to other countries, including Azerbaijan, Russia and the Baltic countries.

“This club unites different people of different ages, demographic status. There are not only women, but also men who knit things for premature babies,” said Galimova.

Another club called Leader is engaged in the search for missing people. Their offices are located in



Aliya Galimova

Nur-Sultan and Ust-Kamenogorsk.

I Am Almaty was one of the first organisations to respond to the tragic events in the Arys and provided first aid to the residents.

The Kamkor organisation helps older people and people with special needs.

Kazakhstan’s National Volunteer Network brings together more than 80 volunteer organisations across the country. One of their projects, Zhenys, provides help for veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Zhenys means victory in Kazakh.

There are seven key areas for developing volunteering: educa-

tional services, medical services, environmental services, mentoring people in difficult situations, emergency response, services for the elderly and work to preserve spiritual, cultural and historical values.

As a part of educational volunteering, volunteers in all regions will help children from rural schools prepare for subject Olympiads, Unified National Testing and mid-term exams.

“Volunteers can give new skills in computer technology, robotics and other innovative areas. We assume that within the framework of the Birgemiz Bilim (Joint Education) project in each region, 1,000 rural school students – a total of 14,000 students – will be reached by this assistance from volunteers who will help to increase precisely the educational level,” she said.

Medical volunteering will include work in hospices and oncology centres. Galimova noted the example of Arman Kasymov from Atyrau City, who was working at an oil company on a rotational basis and volunteered on the emergency medical team in his spare

time, saying he should motivate others.

“This club unites different people of different ages, demographic status. There are not only women, but also men who knit things for premature babies,” said Galimova.

“It [volunteering] helps both medical professionals and citizens. Such examples will cultivate, illuminate and engage the population,” she said.

One environmental volunteering organisations in Kazakhstan is Birgemiz. Sabagtastyq.

The Asyl Mura initiative will be developed to preserve spiritual, cultural and historical values, she added.

The ministry created the web

platform Qazvolunteer.kz to facilitate the search for volunteer organisations and projects.

“Anyone who wants to become a volunteer can register on this platform... In the future, when we have snapshots of individual volunteers, organisations can reach out to them based on their previous experience and the assessment of the previous volunteer organisation,” said Galimova.

According to her, it is a stereotype that volunteers are mostly youngsters. Currently, the average volunteer is 35 to 40 years old, with an active civic position and professional experience and education.

Some Kazakh companies have developed corporate volunteering in a business environment, which should also be introduced in small and medium-sized companies, she added.

The government plans to organise the Zhana Bastama (New Initiative) competition where approximately 10 volunteer initiatives will be selected from each region. Approximately 1 million tenge (US\$2,657) will be given to the

volunteer organisation to compensate its various expenses. Also the ministry will establish an award for the Best Volunteer of the Year to motivate people to volunteer.

“We also envisage several opportunities for our volunteer organisations to be able to go abroad to large dialogue venues, volunteer conferences, in order to exchange experiences and talk about Kazakhstan’s experience,” she said.

Galimova added she expects Kazakh volunteers to participate in large projects such as a global technical meeting in New York in July of this year or Expo 2020 in Dubai.

“I think, volunteers from Kazakhstan will be a prominent segment, having behind them the vast experience of organising Expo in Kazakhstan,” she said.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has declared 2020 the Year of the Volunteer in Kazakhstan. In 2016, a special law on volunteering was adopted in the framework of the 100 Concrete Steps plan to help develop volunteering systematically and sustainably.

Kazakh activist launches equal access project to improve entry to public spaces

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh activist Zhaslan Suleimenov launched the Equal Access project last year to improve accessibility to the nation’s public spaces. The operation received a four-month, \$6,000 grant in June from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Central Asia Media Programme.

The main goal is to draw public attention to the problems faced by people with limited mobility, including those with disabilities, elders and parents with strollers, said Suleimenov in an exclusive interview for this story. For individuals with vision or hearing impairment, special facilities such as tactile tracks and sound alerts should be installed.

In 2015, Kazakhstan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 20 states government bodies should ensure their personal mobility, he noted.

The grant supported the effort, which he started several years ago. The funds allowed him to brand the project, buy basic camera equipment and increase video content quality by hiring designers and video editors. Although the project ended in September, Suleimenov has continued to cre-

ate videos promoting the interests of people with limited mobility and improve accessibility to public spaces.

“We started at the city level, then reached the national level, now the USAID. The U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan published (a story about the project) – this is already at an international level,” he said.

Suleimenov uses social networking as the most important tool for conveying the message. A YouTube channel and Instagram account promote his activities and raise awareness about problems.

“Initially, the main platform was my accounts in social networks – YouTube, Instagram – where there are old videos, too. At the time of the project, an additional account on Instagram @zaravniydostup was created,” he said.

As a result of the project, the capital’s city administration mandated constructing a new ramp meeting international standards. The national railway company Kazakhstan Temir Zholy and transport enterprise Astana LRT accepted recommendations to increase public space accessibility, including implementing mobility skills training for staff members.

“I am satisfied with the results, but we do not stop there. We need to look for new ways, solutions, new ideas,” he said.

Suleimenov is working to in-

crease his educational potential and qualifications by taking various trainings and seminars. He is currently studying through the on-

line media school Medianet, Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan Human Rights Programme and Academy of Public Administration.



Zhaslan Suleimenov

Tokayev encourages youth...

Continued from Page B1

The renewal of the government is one of the priorities of Tokayev’s domestic political course.

He also noted Kazakhstan had managed to build a government system that has proved its effectiveness in the most difficult times under the leadership of First President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

At the same time, new approaches to the work of the government are necessary to meet new challenges.

According to Tokayev, many countries are in search of governance models that ensure balanced development, offset imbalances and social inequality. Inequality is one of the most used terms in the world economic literature. Norway, New Zealand and the United States study the agile principles in governmental activities. Many countries use the United Kingdom’s experience with project management and create project offices under governments.

“We are also making similar efforts. We need to study its effectiveness and we support this practice. The common objective of all new approaches is to be closer to people. We mean the service model of the government. Kazakhstan needs effective and fair model of government,” he said.

The head of state said the number of civil servants would be gradually reduced beginning this year as part of the public administration system reform. The financ-

ing will be used to stimulate the best workforce.

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

“This reduction will be based on the revision of the functions unusual for government agencies and its further transfer to outsourcing or civil society,” he said.

Openness and transparency, inclusiveness and prompt response to citizens are the main principles of the concept of the listening state.

“People should have the opportunity to participate in the discussions of urgent issues. Every voice must be heard. It is necessary to develop appropriate political mechanisms. A draft budget for public participation will be implemented taking into account the opinions of residents of the region regarding government spending,” he said.

The Open Government Portal will also empower people to discuss important issues.

“People should not see officials as special category of people who make decisions regarding the whole society. Officials should not seem to be untouchable. Civil servants are part of the people, work for the people and among the people,” he said.

New approaches and systems based on blockchain, Big Data and artificial intelligence will help respond to the needs of society and solve pressing social problems, Tokayev stressed.

CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Astana Opera to premiere Beethoven – Immortality – Love ballet staged by German choreographer

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – The Astana Opera House is set to premiere “Beethoven – Immortality – Love” ballet staged by German choreographer Raimondo Rebeck Feb. 14 and 15 in the capital. The production is dedicated to Ludwig van Beethoven’s 250th anniversary, reported the theatre’s press service.

Rebeck was inspired by the composer’s life and work. He chose the right moments from Beethoven’s biography to help the audience understand the distant era in which he lived and worked.

“His life was at the same time complex and grand-scale: he created more than 600 pieces of music... I decided to start with his family, to show the training, the education that Beethoven received as a child. The audience will also be able to see the already established personality of the composer,



Raimondo Rebeck

Photo credit: Astana Opera

his mixing with Viennese beau monde. I think that the scene of the Viennese ball will help reveal this side of him. It will show Beethoven’s connection with the nobility, the high society,” he said.

The choreographer was also interested in Beethoven’s profound hearing loss, “which could not go together with the profession of a composer.” As a result, it is one of the characters in the ballet.

The composer started his career as a pianist, then became famous as a composer, and the set, costumes and props will be black and white to resemble a piano keyboard. Only love will have a red outfit.

“These colours seem timeless, eternal, ageless to me,” said Rebeck. “I wish for the people to say that this ballet is relevant when they watch it 10 years from now. Straight lines are the most eternal, unsusceptible to the passage of time; they save from pretentiousness around. The production

should be universal for everyone, like Beethoven’s music was universal, ageless and unsusceptible to time.”

The Missa Solemnis, a solemn mass, will be featured in the beginning of the performance and Symphony No. 9, which includes the choir and soloists, will be performed at the end to show the universal nature of Beethoven’s music.

“In the Viennese Ball scene, we also have Mozart and Haydn’s music, as Haydn was one of Beethoven’s teachers. He had a great influence on him as a composer. To show the illness and deafness, German composer Dirk Haubrich created new works especially for this ballet, arrangements which will not be performed by the orchestra, but a recording will be played instead,” he said.

The aesthetics and story are essential to blend Rebeck’s modern choreography with elements of classical ballet. He wants the danc-

ers’ movements “to create an atmosphere that helps to understand the meaning of this ballet; their task is to show emotions, convey feelings and show their acting abilities in duets,” he said.

Astana Opera Ballet Artistic Director Altynai Asylmuratova, Music Director and Conductor Abzal Mukhitdin and Chief Choirmaster Yerzhan Dautov are also involved in creating the performance.

Berlin-born Rebeck has been a recognised ballet master and choreographer since 2003. He has worked with opera companies in Basel, Essen, Hong Kong, Monte Carlo, Montreal, Stuttgart, Tokyo, Vienna, Washington and Zurich and created choreographies for companies in Berlin, Dortmund, Karlsruhe, Munich, New York, Seoul and Stuttgart. In 2018, he collaborated with the Astana Opera Ballet on the world premiere of the one-act ballet “How Long Is Now?” on the 20th anniversary of the Kazakh capital.

Abai’s 175th anniversary...

Continued from Page A1

As a part of the anniversary, sports and culture organisations will hold literary readings, thematic events, national sports competitions, creative evenings, festivals, military unit and other events. Collections of Abai’s works will be translated into Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish and later published.

Poets and composers will participate in aitys (national composing competitions) starting Feb. 8. Three documentaries and a TV series about the poet’s life and oeuvre will be produced.

“Today, the National Cinema Support Centre is accepting directors’ applications for documentaries and short films. Three documentaries about Abai are scheduled to be released this year. In the summer, there are plans to organise a theatrical production, concerts of traditional performers, aitys, exhibitions of rare books and masters, national sports events and various other cultural events in his native Zhidebai [village in the East

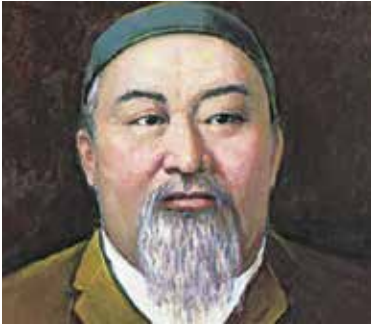


Photo credit: tengrinews.kz

Kazakhstan region],” said Dauyeshov.

Abai’s home region Semei, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), will hold the Abai’s Legacy and World Spirituality scientific conference in August. The capital will host the Abai and the Problems of Modernisation of Consciousness international conference in October.

Measures will also be taken to popularise the Abai house-museum, restore Abai’s Zhidebai-Burili museum-reserve and explain the historical and cultural role of his father, Kunanbai.

“There are plans to improve Abai’s native land in Kaskabulak

village and to build a museum in the Akshoky area,” said the Central Communications Service representative.

Schoolchildren will have the opportunity to take a guided tour of the places where Abai lived and worked. All schools will hold open lessons, thematic essay competitions, exhibitions and poetry readings.

Universities plan to hold scientific conferences and symposiums, Abai readings, poetry and literary festivals, poetry evenings, seminars and competitions to offer the best information about his work. Gumilyov Eurasian National University will be establishing the Abai Academy Research Institute.

Abai (1845-1904) was a poet, composer, educator, philosopher, founder of Kazakh written literature and cultural reformer in the rapprochement spirit with Russian and European culture based on enlightened Islam.

“The name of Abai, his heritage, his life and his example are valuable and sacred to each Kazakh person,” said Dauyeshov.

Kazakhstan-Japan co-production “The Horse Thieves. Roads of Time” released in Japanese theatres

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakhstan-Japan co-production “The Horse Thieves. Roads of Time” was released in Japanese cinemas Jan.18.

Japanese director Lisa Takeba and actor Mirai Moriyama attended the first screening at Shinjuku Cinema Qualite in Tokyo.

The movie premiered Oct. 3-12 at Asia’s largest film festival, the 24th Busan International Film Festival in Korea held at the cinema centre of the same name. It was selected as the opening film and attracted more than 5,000 visitors.

The movie was also presented Oct. 27-Nov. 5 at the 32nd Tokyo International Film Festival.

The project, directed by Takeba and Yerlan Nurmukhambetov, was led by Kazakhfilm Studio and Tokyo New Cinema. Filming was conducted in September 2018 at Tuzkol Lake in Almaty Region.

The main roles were performed by Kazakh actress and Cannes Film Festival winner Samal Yeslyamova, Kazakh actors Madi Menaidarov and Duriga Akmolda and Moriyama.

The film, based on a true story which occurred in Kazakhstan, tells the tale of a 12-year-old boy whose father was killed by horse thieves. At the most desperate period of his family’s life, a mysterious stranger suddenly appeared to help them.

“I read the case in the newspaper and was sorry for those families who suddenly lost their father. I wanted to draw on my screen the feeling of emptiness, the pain of loss and the hopes they had lost,” said Nurmukhambetov in an interview with the Horse Thieves film production committee.

He added the film’s targets both the Kazakh and Japanese audiences.

In 2011, Nurmukhambetov and Japan’s Shinju Sano co-directed “The First Rains of Spring,” which won the Best Film Award at the Eurasia Film Festival in Kazakhstan and Yerevan Golden Apricot International Film Festival in Armenia. The film was selected for the Tokyo International Film Festival and released in Osaka. In 2015, Nurmukhambetov directed his first solo work, “Walnut Tree,” which won the Best Picture Award at the Busan Film Festival. Two years later, the film won the Tulpar Award for best picture and best director.

The film, based on a true story which occurred in Kazakhstan, tells the tale of a 12-year-old boy whose father was killed by horse thieves. At the most desperate period of his family’s life, a mysterious stranger suddenly appeared to help them.

The Horse Thieves production was inspired by Takeba’s dream of filming in Central Asia, which she envisioned after her first visit to Uzbekistan.

Her first feature, “The Pinkie,” won the Grand Prix at the Yubari International Fantastic Film Festival in 2014. The film was also

shown at the Rotterdam and Sitges film festivals. Her second feature, “Haruko’s Paranormal Laboratory,” was also acclaimed at both festivals and screened at the Moscow International Film Festival. Her latest horror, “Signal 100,” will also be screened at Sitges.

Takeba noted Moriyama’s acting talent, his experience studying in Israel and ability to ride a horse made him a perfect candidate for the role.

“If there was a competition for acting at the Olympics, I think Moriyama would surely be able to win a gold medal,” she said at the screening in Tokyo.

Before shooting, Moriyama studied Kazakh language and horseback riding for three months.

“Before filming this movie, I wasn’t in Japan, so I studied (Kazakh language) online using Skype. At the work site, the lines were changing... I could not say anything else that was out of the script, so I think I remembered the lines more than anyone else,” he said.

He added Nurmukhambetov and the staff welcomed him warmly and he would like to return to Kazakhstan.

“What attracted me most in this project was that this is a father-son relationship story. Also, I was quite attracted by the opportunity to come and work here in Kazakhstan,” he said in an interview with Kazakhfilm.

Yeslyamova noted she was interested in joining the international project and working with fellow actors from Japan.

“It’s always exciting to make a film here in my native Kazakhstan and even more exciting to collaborate with Yerlan Nurmukhambetov, whom I’ve known for quite a time since ‘Tulpan’ movie,” she said in the same interview.

National Museum holds designer meeting, fashion shows



Photo credit: the National Museum press service

Continued from Page B1

One of the notable participants was Japanese architect and designer Yuji Imayo, who came to Kazakhstan in 2000 as part of Kisho Kurokawa’s team. Kurokawa was the well-known architect who designed the layout of the city of Astana. Imayo, the chief architect of the capital’s airport, founded Imayo Creation Design and Architecture in Kazakhstan.

He devoted his speech to modern trends in Japanese architecture development and invited participants to visit Japan to gain a deeper understanding of its culture and life. Assylkhanov presented Imayo with the union’s honorary medal for his

achievements and thanked him for participating in the Kazakh projects.

The event included a seminar on the features of designing objects in the context of Kazakhstan’s modern economic development. As a follow up, young Kazakh designers presented a fashion show of their works, some of whom received awards.

The Eurasian Designers Union is composed of more than 400 professionals in the field. Participants note their main goal is greening the ecological culture of society’s consumption and development, as well as cultural continuity and ethnic identification, and optimising design in relation to society’s changing demands.

“One of our main goals is to contribute to the development of design in our country with an emphasis on the design of Kazakh culture and support talented youth in their creative development, which promotes the work of Kazakh design,” said Assylkhanov.

Another goal is to keep the union in the capital, because similar organisations, such as the Writers Union and Artists Union, are in Almaty, he added. To date, the group has held international exhibitions in the city dedicated to the anniversaries of the country’s independence and the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan and is preparing for Abai’s 175th anniversary this year.



Photo credit: kazakhfilmstudio.kz

Samal Yeslyamova, Palme d’Ore winner, stars in this new movie.

Ninety-seven percent of population included in compulsory health insurance database

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Ninety-seven percent of the Kazakh population is included in the compulsory health insurance database, reported PrimeMinister.kz. Since Jan. 1, hospitals nationwide have provided medical care according to the guaranteed volume of free medical care (GOBMP) and compulsory social health insurance (OSMS).

“The work will continue with the remaining 3 percent, or about 550,000 people. More than 88 percent of people already have insur-

ance status, including 54 percent or 10 million people that belong to the preferential categories of people, and others are employees, sole proprietors, persons working under civil agreements and self-employed citizens. The number of self-payers is 2.2 million people, or 12 percent of the population,” according to the release.

All citizens have conditional insurance regardless of whether they contribute to the Health Insurance Fund by April 1. Free procedures include magnetic resonance tomography, computer tomography, enzyme immunoassay and polymerase chain reaction.

According to the Ministry of Healthcare, it is too early to provide any significant results from social health insurance, but most patients feel hospital service has improved and consultative and diagnostic assistance has become more accessible.

The Social Health Insurance Fund received approximately 250 billion tenge (US\$660 million) in payments from July 1, 2017-Dec. 31, 2019. Almaty, the capital and the Karaganda Region led in total contributions. All OSMS funds are kept in the National Bank.

The medical information systems were tested as part of the pilot

project in the Karaganda Region and identified deficiencies were eliminated. Twenty accounting contribution and service payment information systems were integrated using the fund’s systems, Ministry of Healthcare, specialised government agencies and National Bank.

Employers will pay 2 percent of employee salaries this year and 3 percent after 2022. In addition, 1 percent will be deducted from salaries this year and 2 percent in 2021. Those who are self-employed contribute a single payment equal to one monthly calculation index (MCI) (2,651 tenge (US\$7))

in cities or 0.5 MCI (1,326 tenge (US\$3.50)) in villages. Thirty percent is designated for pension savings, 40 percent for the Social Health Insurance Fund and 10 percent for income tax.

All other population categories contribute 5 percent from their minimum salary (2,225 tenge (US\$5.80)) as independent payers.

GOBMP includes primary healthcare and emergency and ambulance services. An individual can make an appointment with a local doctor and receive referrals to local diagnostic testing services or for a doctor’s consultation.

In case of socially significant,

chronic or deadly diseases, a patient will receive a full range of medical services such as specialists’ consultations, diagnostic examinations, hospital treatment, medical rehabilitation and palliative care regardless of his or her participation in OSMS. The list includes diseases such as cancer, diabetes mellitus, arterial hypertension, coronary heart disease, HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis.

If a doctor refuses to provide medical services, the patient can contact Medical Insurance Fund single contact centre at telephone number 1406.

Government to implement new approaches for targeted social assistance

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev, speaking during a recent conference call, instructed government bodies to create a regional schedule for compulsory health insurance coverage, increase the population’s employment, improve medical institutions’ technical bases and raise public awareness about compulsory medical insurance, reported primeminister.kz.

“The main task is to correctly and in an accessible form convey information, clarify innovations in the social sphere and respond promptly to citizens’ questions. People need to have it explained that this year the volume of government support for low-income

families with children, taking into account the social package, has increased,” he said.

Family support centres should operate in large cities in each region, following the example of the Zhanuya centres in the capital and Bakytty Otbasys centres in Almaty. In both cases, people can receive necessary advice and assistance, he added.

Support centres for large and low-income families are currently open in seven regions. Approximately 368,000 large families were paid a social allowance this month, according to Vice Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Population Yerlan Aukenov.

The ministry is continuing to receive documents from citizens applying for targeted social assistance. To date, the government has

accepted applications from 24,000 families and 116,700 individuals. The requests include 4,497 families from Shymkent, 4,098 from Turkestan and 2,702 from the Almaty Region.

More than 2,600 precinct commissions operate in the country and more than 1,000 people have used the call centre services, Aukenov added.

Medical organisations are not completely ready to integrate information and payment systems and train specialists to implement compulsory medical insurance, said Minister of Healthcare Yelzhan Birtanov. The deputy akims (governors) of the Kyzylorda, Mangystau and North Kazakhstan regions, the capital and Shymkent have been updated about the issues.

Matters such as insufficient outreach, lack of reference materials and poor employee department technical equipment should be solved, said Aukenov.

“The akimats (regional and city administrations) need to tighten control over the work of precinct commissions to prevent corruption risks,” he added.

Saparbayev spoke about the need to create a special commission including parents receiving targeted social assistance to obtain feedback on the quality and content of social packages.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev instructed the government to implement new approaches to targeted social assistance, provide a guaranteed social package and introduce compulsory social health insurance.

National resources ministry bans hunting of wolves

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources recently banned the hunting of wolves in the steppe areas in the Akmola, Karaganda, Kostanai, Pavlodar and West Kazakhstan regions, reported the ministry’s press service.

The ban was included in the ministry’s recent publication of the rules regarding wolf hunting in the steppe regions.

“The limit on the regulation of the number of wolves and jackals for 2020 is approved. The limit on the regulation of the numbers of wolves and jackals on the territory of Kazakhstan is annually approved on the basis of biological substantiation upon conclusion of a state environmental assessment. The regulatory framework is a public service provided by the regional agencies on forestry and wildlife through the electronic portal,” wrote Jan. 15 Press Secretary of the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife Saken Dildakhmet on Facebook.

Wolf hunting in the steppe re-

gions is possible only in cases of their attack on livestock or approaching human residential areas or people.

A hunter can apply online to the service titled “Issuance of a permit for the shooting of animal species, the number of which is subject to regulation” through the electronic portal. The permit can also be obtained at any public service centre.

Wolves and jackals are included in the list of animal species, the number of which is subject to regulation to protect health, protect against diseases of agricultural and other domestic animals, prevent environmental damage and prevent the danger of causing significant damage to agricultural activities.

The limit on the regulation of predator numbers is 4,824 wolves and 11,733 jackals in 2020.

Kazakhstan increased penalties for wildlife poaching beginning in December. Illegal hunting and illegal fishing were upgraded from misconduct to the category of moderate crimes with up to four years of imprisonment and a fine of up to 10 million tenge (US\$26,521).

Road conditions continue to improve

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The condition of regional and district roads in Kazakhstan improved by 3 percent in 2019. In 2018, the share of good or satisfactory roads in regions was 68 percent.

In 2019, Kazakh Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development paid close attention to the development of roads of regional and district significance, to which more than 200 billion tenge (US\$530 million) was allocated.

“Pursuing the ‘road to home’ order of the First President of Kazakhstan – Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev, local roads financing was increased since 2018. This year the funding volume exceeded 200 billion tenge (US\$530 million), which allowed to repair 4,600 km

of roads, which, compared to 2014, increased three times, and to bring the share of good or satisfactory roads to 71 percent,” said the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development report from Oct. 22.

These funds were used to implement 386 projects throughout the country. Of them, 37 projects were construction projects, 34 reconstruction projects, 60 overhaul and 255 medium repairs projects. Repair works covered up to 4,617 kilometres in total. All of these amounted to 71 percent of good or satisfactory regional roads.

The leader in the number of projects in 2019 was the Mangystau Region. In this region, five reconstruction projects and two construction projects are in the process of implementation. The region is the first in the ranking of the local network road quality. The

92 percent of regional and district roads are deemed to be in a good or satisfactory condition.

“This year the funding volume exceeded 200 billion tenge (US\$530 million), which allowed to repair 4,600 km of roads, which, compared to 2014, increased three times, and to bring the share of good or satisfactory roads to 71 percent.”

“In 2020, it is planned to repair more than 4,000 kilometres of roads, 350 road projects will be implemented and 75 percent of the local network roads will be improved to a good and satisfactory level. Over the next five years in Kazakhstan, as a part of the Nurlı Zhol State Programme for 2020-

2025, it is planned to repair more than 25,000 kilometres of roads and increase the share of local roads in good and satisfactory condition to 95 percent,” the ministry added.

Over the past five years, 590 billion tenge (US\$1.6 billion) were allocated for the development of regional and district roads, which allowed repairing 15,000 kilometres of roads.



Kazakhstan to ban live animal exports

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan plans to ban live animal exports, reported the Ministry of Agriculture press service. Last year, the country exported 156,000 head of cattle, 78 percent of which were sent to Uzbekistan and 14 percent to Armenia.

Approximately 264,000 head of sheep were exported, more than half of which were breeding stock. More than 200,000 sheep (76 percent) were shipped to Uzbekistan. Russia purchased 21,500 head of small breed of cattle; Azerbaijan, 18,000 head of cattle and Iran, 12,000 head of cattle.

“Live animal export for further processing and resale provided speculative growth of prices for meat. The local meat processing enterprises and feedlots do not

have a sufficient amount of products and the result is the shortage of raw products,” according to the release.

The government is seeking to increase processed product exports by more than 2.5 times as part of the State Agro-Industrial Complex Development Programme for 2017-2021. The ministry must take measures regarding the current situation.

The Ministries of Agriculture and Finance agreed to amend the joint order “On some issues of animal export” based on appeals from feedlots and meat processing plants. The order previously placed temporary limits merely on exporting breeding stock and the changes completely ban live animal export.

Industry expert organisations, local executive bodies and the Atameken National Chamber of

Entrepreneurs responded positively to the draft document. The interdepartmental commission on foreign trade policy and participating international economic organisations also approved the document, which is now being considered by government agencies.

The changes allow preserving and increasing the number of livestock in the coming years, providing domestic meat processing plants with high-quality raw products at affordable prices and increasing production and export of processed products.

A ban on live animal exports will help lower meat prices in the domestic market, said Kazakh Meat Union Chairperson of the Board Assylzhan Mamytbekov at the Jan. 20 press conference. Prices will not fall and only the resellers’ margins will increase.

MIA urges to register foreign vehicles

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The Ministry of Internal Affairs urged Kazakhs Jan. 14 to register their foreign vehicles. It emphasised the need to register vehicles imported from Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, noting EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union) provisions still require it.

“To date, more than 170,000 vehicles registered in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Russia were imported into the country. At the same time, regarding the cars imported from Armenia and Kyrgyzstan and taking into account the presence of transitional provisions on the accession of these countries to the EAEU, there are strict restrictions on their operation on the territory of other EAEU member states,” said a ministry press release.

Cars registered in Armenia and

Kyrgyzstan from 2014-Jan. 1, 2020 can be imported temporarily without paying customs duties or taxes and without ensuring customs duties were paid only by persons permanently residing in the countries. Some procedures, however, are still necessary.

“For citizens of Kazakhstan, the import and operation of vehicles in this country registered in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia is allowed only subject to customs declaration of the vehicle, payment of duties and taxes and subsequent registration of vehicles in Kazakhstan,” it added.

If a Kazakh citizen registered transport ownership outside the country and has a transport registration certificate in his or her name, such transport must be registered in Kazakhstan within 10 business days after acquiring the vehicle by paying all required fees and taxes.

The need to register foreign vehicles arose due to the reckless driving caused by the operators’ feeling of being exempt.

“A sense of impunity due to the lack of registration of foreign transport in Kazakhstan led to the fault of drivers/citizens of Kazakhstan driving foreign registered vehicles; 1,854 traffic accidents were committed, in which 132 people died and more than 500 were injured... In order to suppress the facts of the operation of motor vehicles of this category in violation of the law by the police, raid measures will be carried out together with customs and tax authorities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs calls on citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan who have purchased motor vehicles in other countries to register and voluntarily eliminate violations of the law in the field of customs regulation and traffic,” said the release.

SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

More than 91,000 school students take first round of paid UNT

By Aidana Yergaliyeva

NUR-SULTAN – More than 91,000 Kazakh school students took the first round of paid Unified National Testing (UNT) Jan. 16-20 at 99 exam venues throughout the country. Students with paid UNT results can apply to universities.

The results of the paid test, however, are not eligible in applying for a state scholarship. To be considered for such a grant, an applicant must pass the free national testing again in June.

The Ministry of Education and Science introduced paid UNT to be conducted four times a year – in January, March, June and August. The cost per a test is 2,242 tenge (US\$5.90).

“This decision was facilitated by the repeated questions by parents and applicants about the availability of testing to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as to the National Testing Centre,” the centre’s press service told The Astana Times.

“We were faced with the task of



reducing the large flow of testing in the month of June, understanding with what anxiety the children pass this or that exam. We decided to relieve the situation by conducting UNT four times a year,” it added.

In addition, the applicants can choose to take different combinations of subjects each time, “which makes it possible to increase the choice of lists of groups of educational programmes for admission,” it said.

UNT has been serving as senior students’ final high school assessment since 2004. Students previ-

ously had only one free chance to take the exam.

Test takers should score a minimum of 65 of 125 points to be enrolled in a state university; 60 points to study pedagogical sciences, agriculture, bio resources and veterinary medicine and 50 points for other universities.

The testing centre used 820 rooms equipped with mobile device jammers and video surveillance. It also streamed an online broadcast from all audiences, said National Testing Centre Director Didar Smagulov, reported sputniknews.kz.

“It’s not a secret for anyone that every year there are corruption scandals around the UNT; tales of established tariffs even go from security services at test points. We received support and assurances from the anti-corruption agency; members of special monitoring will be invited as independent observer groups,” he noted.

The UNT format has remained the same. Students are tested in five subjects, two by choice, with 120 multiple-choice questions in five subjects. Facts surrounding charges and other violations can be reported online using the Digital Agent application, he noted.

The centre prepared special individual assistants and sign language interpreters for children with disabilities.

Local commissions are comprised of representatives from city and regional akimats (administrations), law enforcement agencies, public organisations and the press.

Nearly 98,700 school students took the test between 2016-2018, according to centre date. The majority, 85.18 percent, scored above the minimum passing threshold with an average score of 83.08.

U.S. Embassy to hold fourth annual spelling bee



Photo credit: spellingbee.kz

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The United States Embassy in Nur-Sultan will hold its fourth annual spelling bee across the country during February and March.

The embassy, in partnership with American Corners (library-based English-speaking clubs) will hold local competitions throughout February in 11 cities – Aktobe, Almaty, Atyrau, Karaganda, Kostanai, the capital, Oral, Oskemen, Pavlodar, Petropavl and Shymkent. Shymkent will hold the first competition Feb. 1.

“We are expecting more than 30 participants (in Nur-Sultan). The registration opened recently and is still going. So far, we have 15 participants and 15 more are predicted. Other regions have different numbers of participants; Almaty has more, but we rely on our local participants,” capital American Corner coordinator Saltanat Kuanyshpayeva told The Astana Times.

The judges for the capital bee will be a 4:2 ratio of native speakers and local English teachers. Each American Corner will find judges on its own, although the embassy can help, she added.

The first-place winner in every local competition will receive 30,000 tenge (US\$80); second and third, 20,000 (US\$53) each. The top three from each local bee will get an all-expense paid trip to the capital for the March 14 national competition.

The top four national winners will go to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in April to participate in the Central Asian Spelling Bee. Other Central Asian countries have been holding bees since December.

“Local, national and regional bees are excellent opportunities to support education and to promote American English and American culture, to showcase the partnership between the United States and Central Asia and to build a strong regional network of spaces (American Corners),” according to the competition’s official guidelines.

The event is open to full-time undergraduate students age 18-25 attending a Kazakh university. Students must register by Feb. 5 at spellingbee.com.

“We promote our event on all universities’ social media, because we want to engage bachelor students. KAZGUU, Nazarbayev University, Eurasian University and others receive our emails,” said Kuanyshpayeva.

“The criteria for the participants’ age is set by the organiser, the U.S. Embassy. Kazakhstan may not have a tendency among students to still be studying by 25, but the criteria is global; in the rest of the world, it is not unexpected,” she added.

Central Asia holds its own spelling bee due to local language capabilities, such as the ability to perceive words in a certain accent. Central Asians have a unique blend of Russian and Turkic languages that differentiates them from countries like Russia.

The national and regional spelling bees stemmed from the idea of uniting all American Corners.

“People liked it when we held it the first year. We tried to attract celebrity speakers. We had an advertisement with (actor) Daniyar Alshinov. (Actor) Anuar Nurpeisov was the host of the first competition,” said capital corner makerspace coordinator Aigerim Tleukhan.

Spelling bees started in the United States in the 1800s, as schools tried to induce students to learn the standardised spellings from the newly-published Webster’s Dictionary. The first national competition was held in 1908 in Cleveland and the event has been an annual one since 1925.

Spelling bees require contestants to recite words he or she hears and correctly spell them as listed in the dictionary. The person may ask the host to repeat the word; provide the definition, part of speech and language of origin and use it in a sentence. The difficulty of the words varies, as English has adopted many words from other languages.

“Gaining more and more interest every year in Kazakhstan and in the number of people wishing to participate, the spelling bee contest is a large part of American culture. For over 90 years, schoolchildren across America have been participating in the competition,” according to spellingbee.kz.

Public services have improved since 2018, survey finds

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – The quality of Kazakh public services has increased 2.4 percent since 2018, according to a survey commissioned by the Civil Service Agency. The review, conducted by the Zor Rukh Charity Foundation, was completed to identify the level of satisfaction with quality, accessibility and procedures.

“The monitoring results helped develop recommendations to improve the provision of public services, including simplifying them and reducing the time and list of documents, as well as optimising and automating business processes. The level of public satisfaction in

the quality of public services was 74.8 percent, which is 2.4 percent higher than last year (72.4 percent in 2018). The average rating amounted to 4.73 points on a five-point scale,” reported the agency.

It noted the main concerns were the timing and cost of services, quality of feedback and lack of employee competence and efficiency.

The survey of 14,219 service recipients showed 51.5 percent have contacted individual offices providing certain government services. In 40.3 percent of the cases, the individuals were referred to Public Service Centres (PSC), only 1.6 percent of which had self-service areas. Other 8.2 percent received public services from the website

using their computers or mobile applications.

Services such as state registration for issuing private bonds, passes to enter and stay in the borderline, dormitory provisions for technical and vocational students, queuing preschool children (up to age six) for preschool organisations and issuing licenses for appliances and installations generating ionising radiation received the highest marks.

Services such as ambulance calls, state registration for real estate rights, trademark registration and sanatorium treatment and paperwork for prosthetic and orthopaedic care for those with disabilities received the lowest ratings.



Photo credit: rnbusiness.kz

“Using the results of public monitoring, we formed a rating of central government agencies that provide public services. The leaders are the National Security Committee and the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development with average scores 4.99 and 4.95, respectively. The Ministry of Digital, Innovation and the Aerospace Industry Development, the Ministry of Energy, the National Bank, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of National Economy also have high positions,” noted the statement.

It added a significant segment of public services has the potential for improvement. Work should continue on optimising state bodies and the Government for Citizens State Corporation; the qualitative relationship between state bodies and corporation branches is equally important.

The survey found compliance with key principles like transparency, legality, objectivity, comprehensiveness, reliability and impartiality. Information, accessibility, employees, procedure, timing, costs, feedback and results were the criteria used to access the quality of providing public services.

The survey covered 65 of the most socially significant public services. Respondents contacted various structures and organisations, depending on the body providing the service in accordance with the standards.

Every fifth teenager is bully or victim of one, say scientists

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Every fifth Kazakh teenager aged 11-15 is either a bully or the victim of one every month, reported the Ministry of Healthcare’s National Centre for Public Health press service.

Bullying involves not only physical aggression, but psychological pressure, intimidation, gossip, extortion and mocking. It can be in the form of physical contact, words, facial expressions, obscene gestures and a desire to consciously exclude the victim from a group or community.

In 2018, scientists from the centre surveyed Kazakh schoolchildren to study health and well-being indicators among teenagers. The information is collected and studied by the research team every four years.

Schoolchildren were asked how often they took part in bullying or cyberbullying, or became its victim in school, in the past two months. According to the researchers, both victims and offenders experience associated and future mental health problems.

The results showed 17 percent of adolescents aged 11-15 are bullied monthly at school. Urban schoolchildren are more likely to be bullied than rural ones. Twenty percent of adolescents aged 11-15 participated in bullying. Bullying behaviour is highest among boys aged 11-13, then reduces among boys and girls at age 15.

Cyberbullying has resulted from new technologies and the popularity of social networks. It includes offensive messages and posting derogatory comments and humiliating photos, as well as threatening



Photo credit: liner.kz

or intimidating someone in electronic form.

Cyberbullying has a negative effect on adolescent health, contributing to serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety,

tributing to serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety,

ety, low self-esteem, emotional disorders, substance abuse and suicidal behaviour, according to the report. More than 12 percent of those 11-15 were subjected to cyberbullying and 11 percent of adolescents have experienced it at least once. The behaviour is more common among boys.

Scientists suggest schools introduce bullying prevention programmes, involve parents, use disciplinary methods, improve the social climate and monitor children’s behaviour to reduce the level of bullying.

Nationally, it is important to integrate bullying prevention strategies and programmes, increase public awareness and develop support service for victims of bullying or cyberbullying. Improving interaction between violence prevention and health services and evaluating existing laws regarding violence are also essential to combating the issue.

Travel blogger popularises country’s tourism



Photo credit: Talgar Samatov.

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Social networking has led to rising interest in tourism among the population, says Kazakh travel blogger Ulan Alimbek. He popularises travel by introducing people to interesting sightseeing spots and providing information about routes and trip planning costs.

“I tell my subscribers daily what places to visit in Kazakhstan, give advice on what kind of transport to use, how much it costs. I give information in detail because I don’t want people to think that it is unavailable or expensive,” he said in an exclusive interview for this story.

During his university years, Alimbek organised trips to Kazakh natural attractions, which were particularly popular among students, youngsters and foreign guests. While Kazakh tourism was once a “private club” available only to a limited number of people who knew about interesting locations, social networks have opened information to the public about the country’s natural attractions.

“We went to the Charyn Canyon, which is now so popular that you can meet people there every day, but when we went there, it happened that even on weekends you could not meet anyone there,” he said.

Kazakh tourism has made great progress in the last 10 years as demonstrated by improved roads and air connectivity growth.

“Now, there is a choice... it (air travel) is more affordable even than railway,” he said.

The increased number of local guides, transportation companies,

guest houses and hotels near the most popular natural attractions make travelling easier. The recent micro and small business tax exemption also contributes to tourism growth, which is mostly seen in small enterprises such as transportation companies, local guides or guest house owners.

For tourists visiting for the first time, Alimbek recommends travelling to Almaty Region, which he calls “a test sampler of Kazakhstan,” a collection of the country’s various natural attractions concentrated in one place.

“Here (in Almaty Region), you can find everything you want: forests, mountains, steppes and desert zones; there are hot springs and lakes including mountain lakes and simple ordinary steppe lakes,” he said.

Altai in East Kazakhstan Region is home to large forests and mountains, while deserts can be found in Karaganda, Kyzylorda and Mangystau regions.

“Mangystau Region is distinguished by its nature. There are many lovers of this nature; there is neither forest nor grass there, but people like it,” said Alimbek.

In winter, ski resorts in Almaty Region and East Kazakhstan Region open their gates and attract many guests. In the northern part of the country, ski tourism develops even on small hills, he added.

Alimbek has participated in a number of expeditions across Kazakhstan, including national treks such as Kieli Kazakhstan and the Saryarka expedition. To date, he has visited 38 countries and 300 cities. In 2018, he won the National Tourism Award for Best Account for Tourism in Kazakhstan.

Shymbulak Ski Resort ranks first in Commonwealth of Independent States

By Galiya Khasenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakhstan’s Shymbulak Ski Resort ranked first on the list of the best ski resorts in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), according to Russian tourism and sport website turstat.com.

The rating highlights the best CIS resorts for winter vacations, especially January and February. The website notes the best skiing and snowboarding spots are in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The list was released in honour of World Snow Day, started by the International Ski Federation (FIS) in 2012 to celebrate winter sports. World Snow Day is the third Sunday of January, which this year was Jan. 19.

The website released two lists based on tour analysis and vacation offers – the most popular ski resorts and the most visited. The top three in the latter category are all in Kazakhstan – Shymbulak in Almaty, Altai Alps near Oskemen and Nurtai near Burabay. They were followed by Belorussian Lahoyks and Silichy (Belarus), Shahdagh and Tufandag (Azerbaijan), Tsaghkadzor (Armenia), Karakol (Kyrgyzstan) and Chingan (Uzbekistan).

The most popular resorts are rated by country. Kazakhstan leads the

list, with Shymbulak at the top, followed by Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

“Our resort is year-round and has all seasons. Our resort is probably the most recognisable besides our friends, Rosa Khutor (Russia). In addition, we have the longest skiing season among CIS resorts. Due to artificial snow and our soft and comfortable climate, our season lasts from November-May,” the Shymbulak Mountain Resort press service told The Astana Times.

Many foreign tourists are eager to visit the resort each season and share their experiences when they

return home. Of 800,000 visitors each year, 30 percent are from abroad, it added.

To stay on top, Shymbulak has continued to add and develop its services, including renovating and expanding the renting facility and locker rooms, renewing the inventory and digitising the renting process. The Shymbulak Mountain Resort mobile app, launched in November, allows users to book tickets, check weather and track conditions, look up hotels and learn about upcoming events. The website allows vacationers to book skiing and snowboarding instructors online.

The resort has also started snowcat guided tours, a special truck used to prepare the slopes and travel across the snow. Gorilla Snow Park was moved to Left Talgar Gorge to accommodate expanding the ski area. In the new season, it will host competitions featuring international riders, such as flight and gliding masters performing stunts at Gorilla Winter Jungle.

“We take care of the resort’s visitors and constantly develop the infrastructure. The fact that the resort has received recognition is not surprising,” said the press service.



Photo credit: inform.kz.

Schengen visa fees to increase to \$88 starting February

By Zhanna Shayakhmetova

NUR-SULTAN – Schengen visa fees will increase for Kazakh citizens from \$66 to \$88 for adults and from \$38 to \$44 for children from ages six to 12 as of February 2020, according to Schengenvisainfo.com.

All representative missions of the Schengen countries located abroad are obliged to apply the new rules as part of the updated Schengen visa code adopted by the European Union Council in June 2019 for “the purpose of strengthening the common visa policy while taking into account migration and security concerns.”

“The external service providers are allowed to charge a service fee, which cannot be higher than the visa fee. This means Kazakhs applying at an external visa service provider may have to pay up to

\$177 per visa application, if the external service providers set the maximum service fee permitted, which is \$88,” reads a press release on the change.

According to Gent Ukehajdaraj from SchengenVisaInfo.com, due to this mechanism the fees may increase to \$177, if EU authorities deem it necessary.

“A visa fee of \$133 or \$177 will apply to non-cooperative third countries, in cases when the EU Commission considers that action is needed in order to improve the level of cooperation of the third country concerned and the Union’s overall relations with that third country,” Ukehajdaraj added.

This provision shall not apply to children under 12 years old. The mechanism may also shorten visa validity and introduce prolonged visa processing periods.

The new rules also permit ap-

plications to be submitted up to six months in advance of a trip, instead of the current three, and provide opportunities for regular travellers with clean visa histories to be issued multiple entry visas with lengthier validity periods.

According to SchengenVisaInfo.com, Schengen member states that are not represented in Kazakhstan in terms of visa admission are now obliged to cooperate with external service providers to facilitate visa applications.

“Since Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation (EC) No. 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code) is binding in its entirety, and is directly applicable in all EU Member States in accordance with the Treaties, all Schengen countries, including Lithuania, will apply it from 2

February 2020,” said an official from the Information Monitoring and Media Division of Lithuania.

In 2018, Schengen embassies and consulates in Kazakhstan processed 157,608 visa applications, rejecting 7,544 of those for a rejection rate of 4.8 percent.

German consulates in Kazakhstan saw the highest number of visa applications, with 40,829 requests received. The Italian consulate was second, receiving 20,009 applications, and the Czech Republic third with 16,925 applications.

In 2018, Kazakh travellers spent \$10.4 million on visa applications to Europe.

Overall, more than 14.2 million people used Schengen visas in 2018 to travel around Europe.

A Schengen visa allows a person to travel to any member of the Schengen area for up to 90 days for tourism or business purposes.



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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

Anastasia Gorodko wins two dual moguls golds at FIS European Cup in Switzerland

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh athlete Anastasia Gorodko made her international debut by winning two gold medals in dual moguls Jan. 13-14 at the International Ski Federation (FIS) European Cup in Airolo, Switzerland, reported Olympic.kz.

Gorodko, 14, won her first gold Jan. 13, earning 130 points, reported fis-ski.com. Janneke Berghuis, 18, of the Netherlands placed second with 104 points, followed by Katharina Ramsauer, 24, of Austria, who took the bronze with 78 points. Kazakh athletes Olesya Graur, 15, came in fourth with 65 points and Oleg Tsinn, 20, was 17th in the men's competition.

Gorodko won her second gold the following day, again scoring 130 points. Berghuis was second with 104 points, while Germany's Sophie Weese, 20, came in third with



Photo credit: Olympic.kz

78 points. Graur finished 10th with 33.80 points and Tsinn 22nd with 16.20 points.

The Kazakh moguls team stepped forward in their work in 2019, head coach Yelena Kruglykhina said last October.

"It went just great; all the athletes stepped forward and this was appreciated by the coaching staff. It is

always nice when your work is visible... The programmes of all athletes are approved. Ayaulym Amrenova, Sergey Romanov, Alexander Gebert and Anastasia Gorodko will carry out new programmes in separate competitions," she said then.

In a Nov. 18 interview with zakon.kz, Kruglykhina noted the team's goal in the new season is to

show the best results, while young athletes like Gorodko and Graur will fight for Olympic licences to the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing.

"[We want to] show the best results. The current world champion Yulia Galysheva and the holder of the silver medal of World Cup 2017/18 in the mogul Dmitry Reicherd have the task to fight for Crystal Globes (the award presented to the World Cup winner based on the sum of the results at all stages), Pavel Kolmakov will aim for the podiums and the stages of the World Cup and young athletes will begin to improve their results so that in the next two seasons they will fight for the Olympic licenses in Beijing 2022," she said.

The FIS European Cup was organised by Ticino Freestyle, an organisation created by the Italian Swiss Ski Federation (FSSI) with the aim of designing freestyle events in the canton's discipline.

Kazakh national boxing team holds joint training camp ahead of Olympic qualifiers



Photo credit: olympic.kz

Head coach of the Kazakh national boxing team Galymbek Kenzhebayev.

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The Kazakh national boxing team began a joint training camp with teams from Belarus, England, Germany Jan. 21 in Nur-Sultan, the National Olympic Committee of Kazakhstan reports.

The athletes have been preparing for the Asian Boxing Qualification Tournament, which was scheduled for Feb. 3 to 15 in Wuhan, China, but which will now be moved and postponed due to the outbreak of coronavirus in that city. The competition will now take place March 3 to 11, and while no new venue has yet been announced by the boxing working group of the International Olympic Committee, it will not be held in China.

"Nevertheless, the team continues its training, which was excellent... Now we have gathered in Nur-Sultan, where boxers from England, Germany and Belarus are also present. We are sparring, training," Kazakh boxing head coach Galymbek Kenzhebayev said.

With the tournament postponed, the national team decided to add one more training camp to its schedule as well as reduce the intensity of training sessions.

"The boxers reacted quite calmly to the postponement of the tournament. They do their job. All of us are professionals," Kenzhebayev said.

Prior to the training camp in the capital, the team trained Jan. 5 at the World Boxing Academy in Almaty, alongside teams from Cuba, Japan and Hungary.

The head coach said Cuba brought a strong roster to the training, including the four-time world champion and 2016 Olympic champion Julio Cesar La Cruz, current world champion Andy Cruz Gomez, world champion and Olympic champion Arlen Lopez, and Olympic champions Roniel Sotolongo and Juan Estrada. Hungary brought the winners of the European Championship, while Japanese silver medallist Sewon Okazawa joined the other participants.

According to Kenzhebayev, Kazakhstan's national team has

strong boxers and there are three or four athletes in each weight category who would be worthy Olympic contenders.

"On the one hand, it's good. On the other hand, it's inconvenient, because only one boxer can represent his weight in the national team at such tournaments," he said.

He added such intense competition among the athletes increases their competency.

In the 81 kilogramme weight category, the strong boxers include current world champion Bekzad Nurdauletov, Asian champion Bek Nurmaganbet and world youth champion Nurbek Oralbay. At 91 kilogrammes are the experienced fighter Vasily Levit and young but promising athlete Aibek Oralbai. Recently, Sagyndyk Togambay, a two-time Asian youth champion and World Cup silver medallist, was also included in this category, he said.

"The choice is difficult. We will bet on those athletes who, first of all, show stable results. Those who are better prepared and healthy, 100 percent, they will go on to win [an Olympic berth]," Kenzhebayev said.

In the Asian tournament, Kazakhstan's main rival is Uzbekistan.

"But I will tell you that boxing is developing incredibly in Asia. Strong boxers have appeared in India, Thailand and the Philippines. And now at the world level the Asian boxing is in trend. This was shown at the 2019 World Cup," he added.

The working group on boxing at the Tokyo Olympics 2020 established new selection rules for the Olympics, which state that boxers will have the opportunity to participate at the four continental qualifying competitions from February to May 2020.

The African tournament will take place in Dakar, Senegal, Feb. 20 to 29. The European qualifying tournament will be held in London March 13 to 23. Americans will compete at the qualifiers in Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 26 to April 3. The world qualifying tournament will be held May 13 to 14 in Paris, France.

Russian TV channel releases documentary about Denis Ten

Continued from Page B1

The script was mainly Stolbovskiy's work, but, according to Railyan, the scenario was not developed until Stolbovskiy arrived in Almaty. The producers had ideas, plans and wishes to meet certain people, but the final product emerged from the shot material.

"What surprised and pleased me the most was that not a single person refused to meet us. As soon as they heard Denis'

name, they agreed to talk about him. After all, these are all well-known and busy people – Roza Rymbaeva, Ilya Ilyin, Alexey Yagudin. In this case, we did not have to direct them in their memories. In most cases, these were monologues with slightly wet eyes and smiles on their lips when they talked about Denis," he said.

The film is divided into 13 parts, with Ten's friends and fans recalling how they met him; what a

good, kind, bright person he was and the tragedy of his death.

Ten was the 2014 Olympic bronze medallist, two-time World medallist, 2015 Four Continents champion, 2017 Winter Universiade champion and five-time Kazakhstan national champion. He died in July 2018 at the age of 25 when he tried to stop two men from stealing his car mirrors.

"It is nice that almost all Kazakh media reacted to the film about Denis Ten. Match TV placed it on

all of its video platforms. People gratefully comment on our work. You can read many friendly comments on YouTube. The film has not aired on TV yet, but you need to understand that for TV you need a slightly different format than for video platforms. I take this opportunity to recommend everyone to watch the film 'Denis Ten. Thirteen.' In my opinion, this is a very successful work with many exclusive materials, filming and frank stories," said Railyan.

Para taekwondo athlete receives Paralympic license

By Nurdana Adylkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Kazakh para taekwondo athlete Nurlan Dombay, the world ranking leader in the K43 category (up to 75 kg) in accordance with Paralympic Games 2020 qualifications, has received his license for Tokyo.

Dombay is a two-time world, three-time Asian and two-time European champion. In 2019, he won gold medals at the World Championships in Turkey, Asian Open Championships in Jordan and European Open Championships in Italy and silver at the African Championships in Egypt.

"It was very impressive when Kazakhstan's flag was raised and the anthem was played," he said in an exclusive interview for this story.

Tokyo will be Dombay's first Paralympic Games. The competition will be tough, as the 12 participants are the strongest in the

world, he said. He is planning to train for the upcoming competitions in camps in the capital and abroad, as he also expects to participate in the Asia Para Taekwondo Open Championships March 3 in Beirut, Lebanon.

"The preparation is going very

well. The National Paralympic Centre is conducting the first training camp now," he said.

Dombay learned of the license in October, said his personal coach Asan Kasaev in an interview with azh.kz.

"In his weight up to 75 kg, Nurlan has won the highest rating in the world; the second in this weight is Ukrainian Anton Shvets. These two athletes were the first to receive licenses according to their rating," he added.

The victory (at the World Championships) "has come at a heavy cost," said Dombay.

"Now, without stopping, I set myself the goal of winning a gold medal at the Paralympic Games," he says.

Dombay received the Altyn Samgau National Sports Award as the Best Paralympic Athlete in 2019. His recognition and dominance in the sport have served to interest many young Kazakh para athletes to participate in taekwondo.



Photo credit: National Paralympic Committee of Kazakhstan

Three Kazakhs reach third round of Australian Open for first time

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – For the first time, three Kazakh tennis players reached the third round of Australian Open women's singles, reported liter.kz.

Yelena Rybakina, the country's number one player and 26th in the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) ranking, beat the United States' Bernarda Pera (65th) in the first round, 6-3, 6-2. She then defeated Belgian Greet Minnen, 6-3, 6-4.

In the third round, unfortunately, she met Australia's Ashleigh Barty, number one in the WTA ranking. Barty took the match 6-3, 6-2.

"It was my best match at the current Australian Open. I completely fulfilled the game plan. At the same time, I want to com-

pliment Yelena. It is very nice to see a young tennis player here who is great at attacking, moving great and not afraid of anyone. I was preparing very seriously for today's match," said Barty, reported the tournament website.

Zarina Diyas (73rd) beat the United States' Amanda Anisimova (24th) in the first round, 6-3, 4-6, 6-3. She subsequently defeated Russia's Anna Blinkova (58th), 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

She faced Kiki Bertens from the Netherlands (10th) in the third round, losing 6-2, 77-63.

Yulia Putintseva (38th) won the first round by beating Hsieh Su-wei from Chinese Taipei (37th), 6-1, 6-3. She then defeated Danielle Rose Collins from the United States (25th), 6-4, 2-6, 7-5.

Romanian Simona Halep (third) stopped her in the third

round, winning their match 6-1, 6-4.

Although the women could not break the third round barrier, similar to previous Kazakh athletes, having more than one player get this far is an achievement.

Rybakina and Diyas teamed for women's doubles, losing in the second round to Aliaksandra Sasnovich (Belarus) and Viktoria Kuzmova (Slovakia), 6-4, 7-5.

Putintseva and her partner, Russia's Anna Kalinskaya, lost in the first round to Japan's Misaki Doi and Romanian Monica Niculescu (65:77, 6:4, 6:2).

In the men's singles, neither Alexander Bublik nor Mikhail Kukushkin advanced beyond the first round. Bublik lost to Australian Jordan Thompson (6:4, 6:3, 6:2) and Kukushkin to Australian Marc Polmans (6:4, 6:3, 4:6, 68:710, 6:4).

The Australian Open, a Grand Slam event, is one of the four

most important annual tennis tournaments. It is being held Jan.

20-Feb. 2 in Melbourne and offering \$71 million in prize money.



Photo credit: 24.kz

Epiphany bathing took place in city, safety measures were taken



Photo credit: 24.kz



Photo credit: Infomuro

By Galiya Khassenkhanova

NUR-SULTAN – The capital akimat (city administration) organised Epiphany bathing Jan. 18-19, reported its press service. It ensured all safety measures. Special bathing ice holes for all to use were equipped on the right bank of the Yessil River near Makhambet Otemisov School-children’s Palace and the Grand Alatau residential complex and left bank near Stolichny Park. The holes operated from 8 p.m. (after the blessing of the water) to midnight, Jan. 18, and 8 a.m.-1 a.m., Jan. 19.

“The location of these holes is convenient for organising such mass events (convenient road access, parking areas) and the residents of the capital are well aware of these places. The district akimats installed and cut the fountains, installed the handrails, wooden flooring and tents,” the press service told The Astana Times. Orthodox churches around the city held divine services on Epiphany Eve, followed by a procession. The march started from Konstantin-Eleninsky Cathedral at 7.30 p.m., Jan. 18 and ended on the riverbank. The akimat placed its main emphasis on complying with safety

procedures and organising comfortable conditions for capital residents. The Department of Emergency Situations water rescue service and Police Department had on-site safety measures and ambulance crews on duty. “It should be noted that in order to ensure safety, the underwater parts of the holes were equipped with safety nets. Also, with the help of the rescue service, the Department of Emergency Situations organised an off-site press conference with media participation Jan. 15, where safety standards were explained (such as rules for dipping in an ice hole),” reported the press service.

Lifesavers warned everyone wishing to dive that such bathing is dangerous, especially for those without experience, in poor health and with alcohol intoxication, as well as for elder citizens and children. Residents were reminded they could swim only in safe, specially equipped places, where, if necessary, rescue services could provide timely, qualified assistance. When plunging into icy water, a person puts his or her body under extreme stress – a sharp drop in temperature and pressure can lead to respiratory arrest, heart failure, muscle spasms and fainting. All could be fatal if a person does not

receive help within three-four minutes. The operational rescue unit and disaster medicine centre were on duty with 46 people and six equipment units. They also held an additional briefing for bathing participants. In 2018-2019, approximately 30,000-40,000 residents visited the ice holes for two days of mass bathing. The number grew in 2020, because the celebration fell on Saturday and Sunday (the weekend). Tents with food and hot beverages were stationed near the bathing holes. Baptismal bathing is a part of the celebration of the Epiphany of Je-

sus Christ. Orthodox Christianity celebrates the Epiphany Jan. 19. The celebration has two stages. The first takes place in a church on the evening before the holiday (Epiphany Eve); the second occurs the next day outside the church, with a procession to rivers and ponds. The holiday’s obligatory attribute is diving into a baptismal cut in a frozen river. The procedure is considered to cleanse the person of all sins. Though a Christian celebration, it has long become popular among all Kazakh citizens and many non-Christians participate in the annual event.

SPACES.nur-sultan city festival to bring in new exhibitions and workshops



Photo credit: SPACES.nur-sultan Facebook page

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – SPACES.nur-sultan city festival that features exhibitions, lectures and workshops kicked off Jan. 24 and will go through Feb. 7. “The team is convinced that the city, its places and spaces are made by people. What the city needs and where its development opportunities are – its residents know best,” said New Citizen Initiatives programme coordinator Saule Mamayeva, one of the festival organisers. “The goal of the project within the framework of the SPACES.nur-sultan festival is to unite the citizens of the capital who care about the city, to create conditions and spaces where they can make their city even better and more interesting with collective efforts and ideas. With the support of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, we comprehend the development potential of Nur-Sultan through identifying the needs of citizens and the possi-

bilities of the city. We hope you enjoy our initiative and will be happy to host the festival annually,” she said. The festival programme was designed by several Nur-Sultan and Almaty local organisations. Each organiser will bring the city residents activities based on its area of expertise. A presentation of the art library, a lecture on librarianship and a workshop on mobile photography was held Jan. 24 and 26 in the art library in the TSE Art Destination art gallery. Local pop-up festival organised by the Fading.TSE (@fading.tse) “Fading.TSE: Retrospective of the capital” has started Jan. 25 in the House of Kubrin. The festival will include a discussion on “Architectural heritage and places of memory of the capital” and multimedia exhibition “Fading.TSE: Retrospective of the capital.” A lecture by Anna Pashinskaya, co-founder and curator of the international urban festival City Scanning Session “Activating public space with the

involvement of local communities” and the launch of an exhibition of cardboard workshop works will be hosted Jan. 31 and Feb. 2 in the art factory HYDRA (@hydra.kz). The factory also offered city residents cardboard workshops on weekends from Jan. 18 to Jan. 25. Artcom lectures platform (@artcom.platform) will host Feb. 1 master classes, art projects, lectures and performances on art, science and the city at the Nur Alem pavilion at the former EXPO 2017 grounds. Urban Forum Kazakhstan will host Feb. 6-7 the Second International Forum on Indoor Public Spaces and master classes from international experts. Together with curators, researchers, museum workers, theater experts and city activists, the forum organisers will discuss the processes that shape the indoor public spaces of Nur-Sultan. The participants aim to come up with several fresh ideas for reprogramming familiar urban spaces over the course of two workshops.

Officials to assess need to build second light rail

Staff Report

NUR-SULTAN – Government experts will assess the need for a second light rail transit (LRT) line in the capital, said Nurlan Urankhbayev, head of the Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Land Relations, at a Jan. 21 Central Communication Service press conference. “As for LRT, the customer today is the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning. Regarding the second stage of LRT, a feasibility study is being prepared and everything will be ready. It will become clear. If the state examination doesn’t refuse us, doesn’t say that it is not practical, then we will

build it. To begin with, there is a need to prepare a feasibility study. As soon as it is ready, we will pass it on to the examination and, after that, it will be clear. No one will keep the conclusion in secret,” he noted. The examination should assess the viability of the feasibility study, he said. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, speaking at the Oct. 8 capital development meeting, ordered intensifying the investigation surrounding the LRT construction. “The construction of LRT is an unfortunate project. The government and the akimat (city administration) still decided to continue work on putting this, to put it mildly, controversial project into

operation. As I have been told, there is no other way out, because they have gone too far. I would like to turn to the Counter-Agency corruption and I instruct intensifying the investigation. There is no need to go upstairs, ascertaining some people fleeing abroad. It was a planned flight, understandably, while not noticing the others; in particular, the akimat leaders who once made the decision, there are their signatures,” he said. During an extended government meeting, Tokayev criticised the quality of state budget planning and instructed ending the LRT construction issue. The LRT project was optimised at \$1.2 billion, said capital Akim (Mayor) Altai Kulginov.

Residents discuss city memories in public philosophy talk

By Nazira Kozhanova

NUR-SULTAN – Capital residents discussed the meaning of nostalgia Jan. 11 during a public philosophy talk featuring Kazakh Humanities and Law University Senior Philosophy Lecturer Dmitri Melnikov. The event was organised as part of the Talking.TSE series. “In my opinion, our conversation about nostalgia went well. There was a response from the audience – many questions, comments. And I understand why – because the nostalgic memory now is not only the individual interest of some people in their own past, but there is also some fashion for it, especially in post-Soviet countries. In other words, talking about nostalgia now means striving to understand not only yourself, but also the society in which you live,” he said. Melnikov noted the aim of the talk was to help participants look at city memories from a new perspective – not merely as a vessel for information, but also as a way

to learn more about themselves. “The purpose of the lecture and discussion was to look at memory from a somewhat unusual perspective – not just as preserving information, but as a very important experience connecting us with the past. Nostalgic memory can be understood in different ways. It can and should be considered critically when it turns out to be too naïve about what happened. But nostalgia is also a way of self-knowledge – remembering ourselves of the past and involuntarily comparing ourselves with the present. We seem to meet with ourselves, understand something important about ourselves,” he added. Participants noted the talk helped them to delve into questions of whether the city’s historical experience, which was drastically transformed throughout its changes, is a continuation of the present or a completely different experience. “Is phenomenology a conversation about memory or poetry? What is historical experience in the context of Madeleine cake,

against the backdrop of Soviet Tselinograd, transformed into something completely different? Absolutely or the same, but using scarce high-tech materials? Dmitri Melnikov, with another stunning lecture ‘Space of nostalgia: searching for the aura of lost’ at the Wine Sport wine gallery, (tried to help us understand the question); wine and philosophy, as you know, always go hand in hand. At least, precisely in the framework of the Talking.TSE project, which was started by Temirtas Iskakov. Tested personally, told to believe and therefore cheers,” said writer and translator Kanat Omar. The talk was organised as part of a series of discussions, lectures and talks that aims to help residents better understand the history of their city. In other talks, lecturers on history and architecture tackled the capital’s past from different angles. Talking.TSE, created by Fading.TSE public history project founder Iskakov, was supported by Soros Kazakhstan.