



# Kazakhstan News Bulletin

Released weekly by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada  
[www.kazakhembus.com](http://www.kazakhembus.com)

February 3, 2006

Vol. 6, No. 5

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## **Tokaev Says Kazakhstan Eager to Help Afghanistan, Urges Broader Counter Narcotics Cooperation**

Kassymzhomart Tokaev, Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister, offered his country’s assistance to Afghanistan at this week’s conference in London urging Kabul to sign a counter narcotics agreement to help stem opium production and narcotics trafficking.

Speaking at the February 1 Afghanistan Compact conference, which ended with billions of dollars in pledges of international assistance to the struggling nation, Tokaev said, “Viewing Afghanistan as an integral and important part of Central Asia, Kazakhstan welcomes its involvement in the regional affairs to cement that country’s positive political, social and economic achievements. We are strongly committed to continuing our efforts on reconstruction of Afghanistan in partnership with the Afghan authorities and the international community.”

Tokaev explained that Kazakhstan’s assistance to its southern neighbor will be wide ranging, including fighting drug production and trafficking and ensuring sustainable economic development.

## **“Counter Narcotic Belt around Afghanistan”**

Tokaev announced Kazakhstan is planning to sign a cooperative agreement on combating illicit trafficking of drugs, psychotropic substances, their analogs and precursors with Afghanistan later this year. He called for Afghanistan to make its laws compatible with laws of other Central Asian states in order to erect a barrier to drugs trafficking and improve cooperation.



**Warm winter sun. Kazakhs skate at the world famous Medeo mountain skating rink enjoying the winter sun and the smooth ice.**

With this goal in mind, Kazakhstan already actively participates in a UN led project to establish a Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center (CARICC). This Center will become a regional body dealing with coordination of anti-drug activities, analyzing general situation and promoting information exchange between its member states. Kazakhstan has offered Almaty as the headquarters for the center.

### **Wide Ranging Assistance for Economic Growth**

Kazakhstan's assistance in bringing the Afghan economy out of its dire straits will be broad based.

First, Kazakhstan will grant up to 15 scholarships for Afghan students each year, and will sign a cooperative agreement to cover training the Afghans in economics, industry, finance and aviation. Second, Kazakhstan is willing to share its experience in exploring and developing oil fields in the northern part of Afghanistan through joint projects. Kazakh companies also look forward to working in construction of electricity transmission lines, pipelines, roads, and housing. Kazakhstan also stands ready to provide technical assistance in drinking water supply through geological exploration.

Kazakhstan welcomes the three-way cooperation between donor states, the Afghan government and countries and companies in the region in securing lower prices for goods imported into Afghanistan, Tokaev said. He added that his country had already handed over the first proposals to the Afghan government and declared its strong desire to invest in Afghanistan. Kazakhstan could supply construction materials, food and high quality diesel fuel to Afghanistan, Tokaev noted.

To stimulate economic ties, a Kazakh-Afghan joint commission on trade and economic cooperation was established in 2005. Its first meeting will be held in Kabul this April to discuss trade, transport, energy, construction, industry and agriculture. As part of the meeting, Kazakhstan will also present its products in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif. To help promote business ties between the two countries, earlier in January, the Afghan air company "Kam Air" started weekly flights from Kabul to Almaty.

Kazakhstan is also ready to assist Afghan farmers by providing them with grain, mineral fertilizers and agricultural processing equipment. This assistance is important because it will help give the farmers an alternative to opium production making it easier for them to convert to more innocent activities.

Finally, Kazakhstan believes Afghanistan's accession to two regional programs will provide additional boost to regional cooperation and development. One is the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) and another is the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) signed by all Central Asian countries with the United States to promote regional trade. Afghanistan did join SPECA in 2005, but it has not yet signed TIFA.

### **Rice Calls Central Asia "Arc of Opportunity" and Kazakhstan "Engine for Growth" for Region Stretching to Afghanistan**

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recently called Central Asia an "arc of opportunity" saying the United States pins high hopes on Kazakhstan to be "an engine of growth" for the region, including Afghanistan.

Rice's comments came as she announced in early January that the State Department was transferring responsibilities for dealing with Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest economy, along with four other countries in the region, from its Europe and Eurasia bureau to a newly created bureau of South Asian and Central Asian affairs. The reshuffle should help the U.S. deal with the region more effectively and help to promote economic development there, including Afghanistan, devastated by a quarter century of continuous conflict.

State's reorganization has been in the works since 2005 as Washington began to more fully appreciate Kazakhstan's regional leadership role.

Speaking in Astana in October 2005 on her first visit since becoming U.S. Secretary of State, Rice

said, “As this nation’s economy continues to develop, Kazakhstan should view its role as an engine for growth within Central Asia. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would benefit immensely from Kazakhstani investment and energy to stimulate growth and create jobs. And Afghanistan needs the full partnership of this entire region to overcome the destitution that tyrants, and extremists, and warlords, and civil war have compounded over several decades. A secure and prosperous Afghanistan, which anchors Central Asia and links it to South Asia, is essential to the future of economic success.” Secretary Rice added that “the United States is fully committed to helping Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors integrate themselves into the global economy.”

Speaking later in Washington, Rice expanded her earlier remarks saying: “We will need to look at Afghanistan in its regional context. When I was in Central Asia, I was very much struck that the countries of Kyrgyzstan, of Kazakhstan, even of Tajikistan, very much see Afghanistan as a part of the region that is Central Asia. One of the things that we did in the State Department was to move the Central Asian republics out of the European bureau, which really was an artifact of their having been states of the Soviet Union, and to move them into the bureau that is South Asia, which has Afghanistan, India and Pakistan.”

Kazakhstan with four other former Soviet republics Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan forms what has come to be recently known as Central Asia. Until the Soviet Union collapsed that region was referred to as “Kazakhstan and Middle Asia”, which was a reflection of Kazakhstan’s sheer size (about that of Western Europe), its diverse population and its territory which spans both Asia and a small part of Europe.

Today Kazakhstan’s economy is larger than the economies of the four other former Soviet republics in Central Asia. Kazakhstan, with its population of 130 different ethnic groups, has also fostered the growth of a Eurasian consciousness embracing both Asian and European cultural heritages of its diverse population.

In recent remarks, Rice noted the State Department’s reshuffle “represents what we’re trying to do, which is to think of this region as one that will need to be integrated, and that will be a very important goal for us.” She added that the whole region will be very high on her list of priorities.

Former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski used to call Central Asia part of an “arc of crisis”, spanning from the Balkans to the western frontiers of China. Secretary Rice’s comments on Central Asia as an “arc of opportunity” reflect the growing recognition in Washington of the possibilities of the region.

## **Boucher to Deal with Central and South Asia**

In mid-January, President Bush nominated Richard Boucher, former longest serving spokesman of the State Department, as the new Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia. Boucher is a career diplomat who worked as spokesman with six Secretaries of State, and holds the rank of a Minister. A graduate of Tufts University, Boucher served as the United States senior official for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, US ambassador to Cyprus and consul general in Hong Kong. Boucher’s confirmation is a pending matter before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. From there it can proceed to the full U.S. Senate.

Along with five Central Asian countries, the newly reformatted bureau will include Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

## **Opposition Leader Says Will Participate in Democracy Forum**

Alikhan Baimenov, leader of the Ak Zhol Democratic Party and a candidate for president in last year’s election, said he will participate in the newly created commission on democratization in Kazakhstan.

Baimenov, who campaigned on the need for greater political reform and finished third in the December presidential poll with 1.61 percent of the vote, met President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Astana on January 30. Baimenov announced the news after his meeting: “We are undoubtedly interested in

political reforms and intend to participate in the commission's work.”

President Nazarbayev proposed creating the State Commission with a mandate to develop a program of democratic reforms in his September 2005 parliamentary speech. The President said he would chair the commission himself to heighten its profile. The commission will build on the work of the abolished National Commission on Democracy, which was chaired by the Secretary of Kazakhstan's Security Council.

The goal of the commission will be to ensure wide discussion and development of a national program for political reforms. The program's priorities will be focused on developing local self-government and delimiting the authority between central and local executive bodies; strengthening rights and oversight functions of the Parliament and its participation in forming the Government and other Constitutional bodies; introducing elections for akims (mayors and governors); further strengthening the role and functions of political parties; improving the system of protection of human rights and freedoms, including within the judicial process; strengthening and developing the news media; and implementing a national program on the fight against corruption.

Some of the measures are already being implemented, both at legislative and regulatory levels. These include a law introducing jury trials into the criminal matters, a program to curb corruption, and a drive to increase transparency and accountability in government operations, including through “one stop shops” for citizens needing government help.

## **New Information Minister Says Public Television Top Priority**

Yermukhamet Yertysbayev, newly appointed Minister of Culture, Information and Sport, and former outspoken top political advisor to President Nazarbayev, said creating a PBS-like public television will be among his most important priorities.

In his first public comments since assuming the ministerial position in late January, Yertysbayev said, “I believe that since Kazakhstan has chosen a democratic path of development, we need to be creating public television. Of course, Parliament will have to adopt a special law on that. As a minister, I consider creating public television one of my top priorities.”

Yertysbayev made the comments in a wide ranging interview with the Central Asia Monitor weekly newspaper. Explaining his view on relations between authorities and news media, he said they are “like husband and wife who should permanently enjoy love and mutual understanding.” However, the new Minister said he is not “going to let relations between authorities and the news media run irresponsibly.”

Yertysbaev said, “You can criticize the president, the government or any representative of the authorities all you want. This is freedom of speech. But you (news media) should agree that criticism and libel are absolutely opposite and irreconcilable notions.”

## **First Credit Bureau Opens in Kazakhstan**

Seven of the largest commercial banks in Kazakhstan brought the banking sector a step closer to common international practices setting up the first credit bureau in the country.

The banks, Alliance Bank, Almaty Merchant Bank, TuranAlem, CenterCredit, Kazkommertsbank, the Halyk Savings Bank of Kazakhstan, and Tsesnabank, established the “First Credit Bureau” in August 2004. The bureau began its work on February 1, 2006.

The bureau's main goal will be to create credit histories for borrowers and provide professional reports for creditors. The law “On credit bureaus and formation of credit histories” has provided the legal basis for the establishment of this new financial market institution.

## **Almaty Meets Bid Deadline for 2014 Olympics**

Almaty and six other cities vying for the 2014 Winter Olympics returned profiles of their bids to the

International Olympic Committee (IOC) by the February 1 deadline. The IOC announced the news from its headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, on February 2.

The seven cities are: Almaty, Kazakhstan; Borjomi, Georgia; Jaca, Spain; Pyeongchang, South Korea; Salzburg, Austria; Sochi, Russia; and Sofia, Bulgaria.

Each city responded to a 25-point questionnaire covering venues, financing, transportation, housing and security. The documents will be studied by the IOC, and the IOC executive board will decide in June 2006 whether to accept all seven as official candidates or cut the list.

The IOC will select the host city in July 2007 in Guatemala City.

## Things to Watch:

- President Nazarbayev signed a decree on February 2 creating the “Samruk” State Holding Company to improve management of public assets in key strategic areas. The Government has one month to determine principles for Samruk’s operations and which companies’ share will be under its management. Earlier, the President said Kazakhstan needs a state holding company modeled after Singapore’s.
- Foreign ministers of member countries of a memorandum on cooperation to control drug trafficking in Central Asia, part of the UN led efforts to stem the production and trafficking of drugs, primarily from Afghanistan, will meet in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on February 7-8.

### Say It in Kazakh:

*At a party:*

*Let’s have a party tonight? --- Bugun kesh yumdastraiek.*

*Who should we invite? --- Kimderdi shakyramyz?*

*Did you have a good time at the party? – Siz uaqyttynyzdy zhaksy otkizdiniz be?*

*The party was wonderful. --- Kesh ote tamasha otti.*

*We had a great time. --- Biz ote zhaksy demaldyk.*

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News Bulletin of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada

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