



Kazakhstan News Bulletin

Released weekly by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
www.kazakhembus.com

January 6, 2006

Vol. 6, No. 1

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Say it in Kazakh:

*How was your holiday? --- Meiramdy kalai karsy aldynyz? 2006 --- eki myn altynshy zhyl
January – kantar,
February – akpan,
March – nauryz, April – sauir, May – mamyr, June – mausym, July – shilde, August – tamyz, September – kyrkuyiek, October – kasan, November – karasha, December – zheltoksan*

Kazakhstan's Parliament Adopts New National Anthem

Kazakhstan's parliament has unanimously approved President Nursultan Nazarbayev's proposal January 6 to adopt a new national anthem. The new anthem, approved on January 6, will give the citizens of Kazakhstan a greater sense of solidarity and pride.

The new anthem, a very popular patriotic song titled "Menin Kazakstanym" (My Kazakhstan), has become Kazakhstan's unofficial anthem during the years of independence and is performed with great enthusiasm at many public and private occasions. It was originally written in 1956 by composer Shamshi Kadayakov and the poet, Zhumeken Nazhimedenov. The President himself suggested some changes to the lyrics in recent years.

In his letter to the parliament, the President said the anthem reflects Kazakhs' long struggle for independence and promotes hope for future generations to have a better life. "I offer you the reworked lyrics... but I do not claim the authorship," the President wrote in his letter.

The Parliament accepted the changed lyrics meaning the President will be listed as a co-author. The bill will soon become law after the President signs it. That is expected to happen before his inauguration in Astana on January 11, 2006.

The new anthem will replace the one adopted at the collapse of the Soviet Union which still uses old Soviet era music and slightly adapted lyrics.

As he presented the bill to Parliament on Friday, Culture, Information and Sports Minister Yessetzhan Kosubayev said, "There is no doubt that we need a new anthem that will give the citizens of today's rapidly developing Kazakhstan a special sense of solidarity."

To do that and to instill greater national pride and patriotism, the bill will require Kazakh citizens to stand up and place their right hands on their hearts when the anthem is performed, much like people do in the United States. Before, they only needed to stand up.



Colorado Avalanche goalie Vitaly Kolesnik of Kazakhstan sets up to block a shot during his NHL team's skate before a game. Kolesnik will play for his homeland's squad in the 2006 Winter Olympics at Turin.

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Majilis Makes Muslim and Russian Orthodox Festivals Holidays

The Majilis (the lower house of Kazakhstan's Parliament) approved a bill declaring the Muslim festival of Kurban Ait (Eid al-Adha), or the Feast of Sacrifice, and the Russian Orthodox Christmas public holidays. The bill approved on December 28 makes these holidays of the two predominant religions in Kazakhstan official holidays. There are more than 40 different religions in Kazakhstan.

The Kurban Ait is the most important feast of the Muslim calendar. It concludes the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, and this year begins on January 10. The Kurban Ait lasts for three days and commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham) willingness to obey God by sacrificing his son. According to the Koran, Ibrahim was about to sacrifice his son when a voice from heaven stopped him and allowed him to sacrifice a ram instead. The feast re-enacts Ibrahim's obedience by sacrificing a cow or ram. The family eats about a third of the meal and donates the rest to the poor.

Kazakhstan's Government has also moved a day off from Saturday January 14 to Wednesday January 11 to allow for longer celebration this year.

Russian Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 7. This year these two holidays come at almost the same time.

The legislative amendments were introduced into the Labor Code, and not the Constitutional Law on Public Holidays, as Kazakhstan is a secular state.

Kazakh Environmentalists Seek New Green Party

In a country with at least two major manmade disaster areas, a new Green Party is seeking to establish itself as the champion of all things environmental in Kazakhstan.

Mels Yeleusizov, the leader of the Tabigat (Nature) Ecological Union and a former candidate for president in last month's election, is spearheading the effort.

Speaking at a January 5 press conference in Almaty, Eleusizov who garnered less than one half of one percent in the December election, said a Green Party would be in the greatest demand in Kazakhstan.

"Ours will be a party born out of the recognition of the threat of a global environmental catastrophe. The values we profess are social and ecological wellbeing and health for all human beings. With this goal in mind, we are fighting for environmental safety and a guaranteed job and housing for every citizen of Kazakhstan," explained the Tabigat's manifest distributed at the press conference.

Eleusizov said the new party is needed to "elect deputies to the Parliament and to defend our interests through them." He stressed, "While we have a ministry of ecology, a committee on ecology, a lot of ecological [nongovernmental] organizations, we don't have a unified state policy."

The environment, however, has always been a hot button issue in Kazakhstan since independence.

In 1991, Kazakhstan inherited two Soviet era environmental disasters. One is the area around the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site where the USSR had conducted almost 500 nuclear tests. Another is the region around the shrinking Aral Sea which now occupies only a fraction of the area it used to. The shrinkage was caused by agricultural irrigation practices dating back to Soviet days which were designed to boost cotton production in Central Asia.

President Nazarbayev, who just won reelection by a landslide, has continuously kept environmental problems near the top of his priorities. In 1991, he shut down the nuclear test site and has since pursued policies aimed at rehabilitating the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the area. Last year, the Government included a significant budget increase for a three year assistance program to the area focusing heavily on developing the region's economy.

At the Aral Sea, Kazakhstan has built a US\$85 million dam in an attempt to salvage the northern part of the shrinking sea. Benefits from this World Bank financed project are expected to include the return of water, fisheries and improvement in the economic lot of the people in the area.

In addition to these two areas, Kazakhstan, with its heavily industrialized economy and booming oil and gas production in the environmentally sensitive Caspian Sea area, is facing other ecological challenges.

These issues are clearly going to be high on people's minds.

As the new Tabigat initiative suggests, in Kazakhstan the Government is not the only one concerned with the country's environment. A significant proportion of some 5,000 nongovernmental organizations in Kazakhstan deal with the environment providing rehabilitation services for victims of nuclear testing, and providing clean water. Last year, a leader of one NGO, Ecocenter, was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her work.

Eleusizov believes his party will get the 50,000 members needed to be registered by this summer.

Jury Trial Bill Clears Both Houses of Parliament

Deputies of Kazakhstan's Senate approved a bill calling for jury trials on December 29 and sending it on to the President for signature.

The bill would introduce the so called continental model of jury trials. The continental model, which is also called Franco-German, is different from the classic or Anglo-Saxon model. It provides a presiding judge the opportunity to review the case along with the jurors and to join them in the final decision making process. Another difference is that the continental model jurors may acquaint themselves with the materials of the case before the trial. Under the Anglo-Saxon model, used in the U.S., the jurors learn of case details during the trial and only the jurors take part in the verdict.

The bill sets a legal framework for jury trials and outlines responsibilities of local authorities in creating lists of jury candidates. The bill outlines a procedure for creating such lists which will create opportunities for all citizens while providing openness and transparency in the compiling of lists. One of the bill's most important provisions relates to ensuring the independence of jurors.

An accompanying measure was also approved by the Senate which would introduce amendments to the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedures Code, Civil Procedures Code and the Code of Administrative Violations of Kazakhstan.

The President has 15 days to sign or reject the bills.

Kazakhstan Offers Amnesty to Thousands

The Majilis approved a bill on December 28 which would give amnesty 19,000 convicts, if and when approved by the Senate and signed by the President. The amnesty, timed to the 14th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence last December, would apply to convicted minors, women, and the elderly who will return to their families and enjoy normal lives.

Sergei Magda, Vice Minister of Justice of Kazakhstan presented the bill at the Majilis session and said it would affect 5,456 convicts now behind bars and 13,500 people whose conviction did not entail imprisonment. The amnesty would free those convicted for crimes of light and medium seriousness, as well as those convicted for serious crimes provided they have served a certain amount of their sentences.

"We believe giving freedom to these people should not lead to a rise in the crime rate," Magda said. "For example, during the previous amnesty in February 2002 when approximately 10,000 people were freed, only 48 people committed new crimes and that represents only 0.2 percent of those released."

Kazakhstan has been humanizing its criminal punishment system, decriminalizing some offenses, shortening sentences for others or substituting imprisonment with alternative punishments for other crimes.

This strategy has born fruits. As late as 2001, Kazakhstan was among the top three countries with prison population rates trailing only the US and Russia in the number of prisoners per 100,000 of national population. Then the reforms were enacted. As a result, in the spring of 2005, the total prison population in Kazakhstan dropped to 52,608, according to Penal Reform International, an NGO in Almaty. This added up to 342 prisoners per 100,000 of national population of 15.4 million. This put Kazakhstan into 24th place on the list, and the expected amnesty should improve this situation even further.

Kazakhstan's Known Recoverable Oil Reserves Grow Twofold

Kazakhstan's proven recoverable oil reserves grew twofold over recent years to reach 30 billion barrels (4 billion tons) even as production expands and is expected to almost triple over the next decade, according to a senior Kazakh energy official.

Amantay Suyesinov, Deputy Director of the Department of Petroleum Industry of Kazakhstan's Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry, said Kazakhstan also possessed three trillion cubic meters of natural gas. He added probable reserves of oil fields in the Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea would likely exceed 124.3 billion barrels (17 billion tons).

Total oil production in Kazakhstan reached 61.4 million tons (1.3 million barrels a day), Suyesinov said. From that total 52.6 million tons (just above 1 million barrels) were exported.

The three largest oil producers in Kazakhstan were Tengizshevroil JSC with 13.56 million tons, Karachaganak Petroleum Operating B.V. with 10.32 million tons and Kazakhstan's National Oil and Gas Company KazMunaiGas with 9.39 million tons.

Experts estimate oil production will continue to increase in Kazakhstan over the next decade from 1.3 million barrels per day in 2005 to 3.6 million barrels per day (180 million tons) and 2015 accordingly.

The largest increase is expected to come from commercial production at Kashagan, a behemoth Caspian offshore oil field considered among the top five in the world. It was discovered by an international consortium in 2000. Kazakhstan is also planning to develop more oil fields in its sector of the Caspian under a long term program. Already, 224 contracts for oil and gas development are on the books in Kazakhstan, and more are expected this year.

Oil produced in Kazakhstan is shipped mostly to or through Russia, but in mid-2006 the recently opened pipeline to China will begin carrying oil east. Kazakhstan is also negotiating access to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline from Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean and is expected to sign an agreement in 2006. In the meantime, oil tankers are being constructed for transportation of oil from the port of Aktau port through the BTC pipeline. Plans are afoot to enhance throughput capacities of Kazakhstan ports on the Caspian Sea to 45.8 million tons per year.

56 Kazakh Athletes Will Compete in Turin

Fifty six athletes from Kazakhstan will compete at the 20th Winter Olympic Games which begin February 10 in Turin, Italy.

Skiers and ice hockey players make up most of the Kazakh team, and the nation is pinning its hopes on its skiers. Kazakhstan's ice hockey team's first match will be February 15 against Sweden.

A total of 12 teams will compete in ice hockey competition. Kazakhstan and Sweden are in Group B which also includes Latvia, Russia, the Slovak Republic and the USA. Group A includes Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy and Switzerland

The Kazakh athletes are expected to journey to Italy in early February.

Things to Watch:

- People in Kazakhstan will celebrate Russian Orthodox Christmas on January 7 and Kurban Ait (Eid al-Adha, of Feast of Sacrifice) on January 10.
- President Nursultan Nazarbayev will be sworn in for his new seven year term in ceremonies in Astana on January 11.

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