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Kazakhstan Urges Financial, Economic Aid to Afghanistan

Kazakhstan believes it is important to develop programs of financial and economic aid to Afghanistan, Secretary of Kazakhstan's Security Council Berik Imashev said.

"It is necessary to work out concrete economic programs aimed at providing large-scale financial and economic aid to Afghanistan in order to 'de-narcotize' its economy and stimulate conditions for exporting legal products from that country," Imashev said in his speech at a conference, "International Cooperation of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Realities, Tasks and Prospects," organized by Kazakhstan's Senate in Astana on March 14.

"Both the states of the region and world great powers should take an active part in this project. Kazakhstan is ready to contribute," Imashev concluded. The Security Council Imashev heads is akin to the National Security Council in the United States.

Earlier in March, Chairman of Kazakhstan's National Security Committee Gen. Amangeldy Shabdarbayev said his agency is leading a rapidly intensifying fight against drug trafficking and also called for greater international cooperation in fighting this scourge threatening to undermine Kazakhstan's growing prosperity and Central Asia's stability.

Also earlier in March, Antonio Maria Costa, Director of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, said this year Afghanistan's opium harvest could be bigger than last year's record crop. (See [Kazakhstan](#) News Bulletin, March 14)



REUTERS Photo

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev (L) shakes hands with Russia's President Vladimir Putin during their meeting at the Kremlin, Moscow, March 19, 2007. Nazarbayev invited Putin to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan this summer to discuss joint uranium mining and enrichment.

See story below.

Kazakhstan and Russia Stress Strong Ties

President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Moscow on March 18 and 19 for discussions with President Vladimir Putin on a broad range of bilateral and international issues.

According to President Putin, the two countries have agreed to use the Baikonur Cosmodrome and explore the Caspian energy resources more effectively. Russia leases Baikonur from Kazakhstan, and the two nations have stepped up their cooperation in space since last year when Kazakhstan launched its first satellite on a Russian rocket. The two countries also jointly develop oil fields in the offshore Caspian Sea, and Russia remains the single largest transit route for Kazakh oil.

“We believe it is important to concentrate our efforts on the most useful areas of cooperation, primarily in energy,” President Putin said. “Today we have analyzed earlier agreements, including the transit of energy resources, promoting innovative projects in the energy industry and creating joint ventures in this sector.”

The 1.5 billion dollar Eurasian Development Bank, set up by Kazakhstan and Russia last year, will be called to play a meaningful role in new developments, President Putin said.

Russia is Kazakhstan’s largest trading partner, accounting for 20 percent of Kazakhstan’s foreign trade. Bilateral trade in 2006 amounted to 12 billion U.S. dollars while there were 3,500 Kazakh-Russian joint ventures operating in Kazakhstan. The two countries also share the world’s largest land border of 7,500 kilometers as well as strong cultural bonds: there are close to five million ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan and about one million ethnic Kazakhs in Russia.

Moscow and Astana also cooperate within the framework of various regional organizations including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Speaking to news media after the talks, President Nazarbayev said certain former Soviet countries are ready to set up a Eurasian Economic Union: “I believe a certain group of countries are ripe for taking the road Europe has been following [in the past 50 years]. We certainly have such capabilities.” He added both Kazakhstan and Russia believe the 12-member Commonwealth of Independent States, set up in 1991 after the Soviet Union collapsed, “should be preserved as a venue for meetings of political leaders.”

While in Moscow, President Nazarbayev also visited the Ritz-Carlton Moscow Hotel, near the Kremlin, built with the participation of Kazakh investors.

Uranium Enrichment Center, A Means to Prevent Proliferation

One of the biggest issues on the agenda for Presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and Vladimir Putin this week was the creation of an international uranium enrichment center in Angarsk, Russia. Such a center, open for participation from other countries, would offer its facilities for enriching uranium for use in peaceful atomic reactors, thus making it unnecessary for those countries to develop their own full nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. This, of course, is one of the biggest issues for global proliferation of nuclear weapons technologies since facilities enriching uranium for peaceful uses can also enrich it to higher degrees of enrichment sufficient for weapons production.

“Other countries willing to develop peaceful nuclear energy may join [the project],” President Nazarbayev said adding that he invited the Russian leader to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan this summer. There, “we will launch the joint exploration of uranium mines in Kazakhstan, and joint enrichment and production of nuclear fuel [for peaceful uses],” President Nazarbayev noted.

Two days after the summit, officials in Moscow announced Russia and Kazakhstan, which is believed to hold up to 25 percent of the world’s uranium, are expecting to sign a deal on creating the center within a few weeks. Nikolay Spasskiy, vice chairman of Russia’s RosAtom nuclear agency, also explained that participation from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will be key to making the center accepted as a viable alternative source of enriched uranium for countries seeking it for peaceful uses. He said negotiations with IAEA were ongoing.

The current joint initiative from Russia and Kazakhstan is not the only solution being offered

internationally to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons. In September 2006, former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, Co-chairman of the Washington-based Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), offered another. Speaking in Vienna, Sen. Nunn challenged the IAEA and the internationally community to set up a nuclear fuel bank under the IAEA auspices to serve as the ultimate guaranteed source of low enriched uranium for peaceful reactors to support nations that make the sovereign choice not to build indigenous nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. NTI put 50 million dollars on the table as seed money for this stockpile and said its contribution, coming from Warren Buffet, is contingent on two conditions, provided they are both met within the next two years: that the IAEA takes necessary actions to approve establishment of this reserve; and that one or more member states contribute an additional 100 million dollars in funding or an equivalent value of low enriched uranium to jump-start the reserve. Every other element of the arrangement - its structure, its location, the conditions for access - would be up to the IAEA and its member states to decide, Sen. Nunn said.

Public-Private Partnerships Will Help in Building Schools and Hospitals

Kazakhstan will work to build almost 300 hundred new schools and hospitals in the next three years in order to help solve the problems of overcrowding and lack of amenities that have plagued both the country's education and healthcare systems.

Berdibek Saparbayev, Vice Minister of Economy and Budget Planning said most of the new construction for 160 new schools and 131 hospitals will be ensured through public-private partnerships. Speaking at a Cabinet meeting on this issue, Saparbayev added there were 115 schools across the country where students have to study in three shifts (morning, day and evening), as well as 216 broken down schools urgently requiring repairs. He also added 997 small towns and villages did not have schools at all.

Prime Minister Karim Massimov addressed the same meeting saying a comprehensive approach was needed to solve these problems: "We should already be determining at this stage who will work in new schools and hospitals and how we will take care of housing needs for them."

In his annual state of the nation address on February 28, President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced 100 new schools and 100 new hospitals will be built in Kazakhstan during the next three years.

Medical Workers on Trial for Spreading HIV through Blood Transfusions

A total of 21 medical workers are on trial in the southern Kazakh city of Shymkent for their alleged role in causing the worst single HIV outbreak in Kazakhstan's independent history.

Since the summer of 2006, almost 100 children who were treated at a children's hospital in Shymkent have tested positive for HIV after they were given blood transfusions as treatment for pneumonia and other illnesses. The Kazakh Government invited U.S. Centers for Disease Control to help investigate, and CDC later concluded transfusions of HIV-infected blood were main causes for the spread of virus.

The Kazakh Government responded to the crisis by firing the healthcare minister, suspending the medical workers now on trial, and replacing the local governor. It also broke ground for a new children's HIV healthcare center in downtown Shymkent.

As the *New York Times* and *National Public Radio* reported earlier in March, one of the main reasons for the doctors prescribing so many blood transfusions in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in the developing world is because they are believed to have a positive effect on an ill person's health. Another reason cited by parents of victims in Shymkent is corruption among some local health officials who stand to gain profits, however small, from imposing blood transfusions on their patients.

Kazakhstan has a rather manageable situation with the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country, but the problem has been steadily expanding in recent years due to both intravenous drug use and unprotected sex. The trial in Shymkent is expected to last for several more weeks.

Action in Kazakhstan

Following is a story by Neil Genzlinger, published in the New York Times on March 17, 2007.

Apparently a whopping correction is in order. John Ford was widely reported to have died in 1973, but it turns out he is alive and well and still making movies — in Kazakhstan.

That, at least, is what “Nomad: The Warrior,” a big-budget epic newly arrived from that country, suggests. Two other directors, Sergei Bodrov and Ivan Passer, are credited, and there’s not a cowboy in sight, but the film looks and feels like an old-school American western. Not a great western, but a reasonably good example of that genre. Hats off in particular to the horse wranglers.

The story, set in the 18th century, tells of the nomadic Kazakhs’ hope for a leader who can unite their various tribes and drive out the invading Jungars. It’s a bit odd that a tale of nationalistic pride is told using North American actors in several important parts, but one of those, Jason Scott Lee, makes quite a compelling presence as Oraz, a mystic dedicated to identifying and educating this long-prophesized leader, supposedly a descendant of Genghis Khan. The destined lad is Mansur (Kuno Becker), and he’s a bit scrawny for a warrior king, but when his time to lead comes he proves worthy.

The story (written by Rustam Ibragimbekov) is never anything but predictable, including the end result of a triangle involving Mansur, his best friend (Jay Hernandez) and the pretty young woman they both love (Ayanat Yesmagambetova). Clichés are almost as thick in the air as the warriors’ arrows and swords (“Like night and day, good and evil are always together”; “If we are to die, let us die free”), and set pieces from the “How to Make a Western” handbook roll by as if someone’s checking off a list: the surrounded stagecoach, the cavalry gallop, the pivotal duel.

Yet the actors manage to invest all this predictability with a surprising amount of charm. They don’t get any help from the landscape: Kazakhstan, alas, appears to be one extremely brown country. (The rolling hills? Brown. The houses and walled cities? Brown. The clothing? Brown.) The cast does, however, get excellent support from a huge assembly of horses. The scenes are staged with an impressive (and, one hopes, safe) fearlessness, the horses pulling off stunts that Hollywood films usually reserve for cars. The directors love that theater-shaking favorite scene from the old westerns: first there’s the ominous sound of thundering hooves, then a pack of horses crests a hill, then they seem to gallop directly over the camera. A cliché? Maybe. But it looks great here, all the many times it is used.

“Nomad: The Warrior” is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian) for a beheading and other violence.

NOMAD: The Warrior (Opened on March 16 in New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Houston. Wider release: March 30).

Directed by Sergei Bodrov and Ivan Passer; written (dubbed into English) by Rustam Ibragimbekov; directors of photography, Dan Laustsen and Ueli Steiger; edited by Rick Shane and Ivan Lebedev; music by Carlo Siliotto; production designer, Miljen (Kreka) Kljakovic; produced by Mr. Ibragimbekov, Pavel Dovidzon and Ram Bergman; released by the Weinstein Company. At the AMC Loews Village VII, 66 Third Avenue, at 11th Street, East Village. Running time: 111 minutes.

With: Kuno Becker (Mansur), Jay Hernandez (Erali), Jason Scott Lee (Oraz), Mark Docascos (Sharish), Doshkan Zholzhaxynov (Galdan Ceren) and Ayanat Yesmagambetova (Gaukhar).

Things to Watch:

- People in Kazakhstan will celebrate Nauryz, the traditional Spring New Year holiday, on March 22. The country will take three days to celebrate, from March 22 to 24, and will open again for business on Sunday March 25.
- Astana will host the European Union's Troika-Central Asia meeting on March 28.
- Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov is expected to visit Kazakhstan March 29 and 30.
- We still have a few copies available of *Kazakhstan: Reaching for the Future*, a 9-minute video documentary prepared by our Embassy. It tells the story of what Kazakhstan has become in the 15 years of its independence and of the importance of strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the U.S. The video is available at Youtube [here](#). Those in the United States and Canada who would like to receive a copy on DVD, please contact Roman Vassilenko at numbers below.

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