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Kazakhstan's Parliament Ratifies Bioweapons Convention

Members of Kazakhstan's Senate approved legislation on April 17 ratifying Kazakhstan's accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. It now goes to the President for signature.

The Convention bans the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition and retention of microbial or other biological agents or toxins, in types and quantities

that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes. It also bans weapons, equipment or means of delivery designed to use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes or in armed conflict.

During Soviet times, Kazakhstan was home to some key components of covert biological weapons program. The world's largest anthrax production and weaponization facility was located in Stepnogorsk, about 100 miles north of Astana, and was capable of producing two tons of anthrax daily in case of military mobilization. In the Aral Sea, on Vozrozhdenie Island, which is shared by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the Soviet military conducted tests of plague, anthrax, tularemia and other deadly strains. All these facilities have been destroyed since Kazakhstan's independence in 1991 with assistance from the United States under the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program.



Spaceflight participant Charles Simonyi (R) of the U.S. talks during a crew conference from the Zvezda Service module after arriving at the International Space Station in this view from NASA TV. Joining Simonyi in the crew conference are Russian cosmonauts Oleg Kotov (L), Fyodor Yurchikhin (C) and, back row Expedition 14 crew members (L-R) Michael Lopez-Alegria, Mikhail Tyurin and Sunita Williams. (NASA TV - United/Reuters) Simonyi returns to Earth in Kazakhstan tomorrow at 08:30 EDT.

Another facility, the former Anti-Plague Scientific Research Institute in Almaty, now called the Kazakh Scientific Center for Quarantine and Zoonotic Infections, had its security upgraded under the Nunn-Lugar Program and is a key component in Kazakh efforts, supported by the U.S., to conduct research and develop cures for deadly viruses.

Kazakhstan's joining the Convention will mark another step for the country as it strengthens its role as a vocal advocate for nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Accession will also open opportunities for the international community to assist Kazakhstan in rehabilitating the territories and facilities of former test sites.

Today, more than 150 countries participate in the convention which was signed in Moscow, London and Washington in 1972, and came into force in 1976.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev has 15 days to approve the legislation.

Kazakhstan's GDP Should Reach \$300 Billion by 2015

Kazakhstan's gross domestic product must grow to \$300 billion by 2015 if the country is to reach the goal of joining the world's 50 most competitive nations, Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Budget Planning Aslan Musin said at an April 17 cabinet meeting in Astana.

Last year, Kazakhstan's GDP was 9.74 trillion tenge, or \$76.4 billion (at the December 29, 2006 exchange rate), a 10.6 percent increase compared to 2005 (currently \$1=121.8 tenge). The GDP grew by 9.4 percent in 2005, and overall the economy has grown more than 75 percent since 2000.

Musin said the Government expects investments in the next eight years, both domestic and foreign, to reach 127 billion dollars, or approximately 15 billion dollars annually.

By 2015 Kazakhstan should become one of top ten oil and gas producers globally. "That would mean we would need to almost double oil and gas production," the Minister said.

"Total volumes of industrial production should double, while the growth of the processing sector in the GDP structure should reach 40 percent compared to this year," Musin added. He noted, "The share of science intensive, hi-tech industries in the GDP structure should grow at least six fold."

"Kazakhstan's national banking system should ensure the country turns into a financial center for the entire Central Asian region. Agriculture needs to achieve the level of production of East European countries, and Kazakhstan would become one of top five grain exporters in the world," Musin said.

The Government will also work to reform the system of electricity production seeking to reduce the energy consumption in industrial production. "Kazakhstan must also become part of the global transportation and communications system. For that, we need to build a network of modern highways allowing continental and transcontinental shipments," the Minister explained.

The share of small and medium sized businesses in the structure of the GDP should reach 40 percent by 2015, while foreign trade will need to at least double in volume.

Population Grows to 15.4 Million, More Births, Less Emigration Are Reasons

Kazakhstan's population grew to 15,396,600 by January 1, 2007. The figure reflects greater numbers of live births and smaller emigration abroad.

Compared to 2006, the population grew by 177,600 people, with 81.4 percent of the growth coming from natural growth and the rest coming from more people coming to live in Kazakhstan than leaving it.

The natural growth of the population amounted to 144,546, or 9.4 people per 1,000. This is higher than eight people per 1,000 in 2005.

Migration trends showed a positive balance of 33,041 people, which includes 66,731 immigrants and 33,690 emigrants. The number of people who came to live in Kazakhstan decreased by 10.8 percent

compared to 2005, while the number of emigrants shrank by 35.4 percent.

According to statistics, women are in a slight majority in Kazakhstan with 51.9 percent of the total. There are 1,078 women for every 1,000 men.

Children under the age of 16 account for 25.9 percent of the population, people of working age account for 63.8 percent, while another 10 percent are retirees.

More people live in cities and towns across Kazakhstan than in the countryside: 8,833,300 (57.4 percent) versus 6,563,600 (42.6 percent).

Out of more than 100 ethnic groups, seven account for 95 percent of the population including Kazakhs (59.2 percent), Russians (25.6 percent), Ukrainians and Uzbeks (2.9 percent each), Uighurs and Tatars (1.5 percent each), and Germans (1.4 percent).

Kazakhstan Takes Three Straight in Int'l Ice Hockey

Maxim Komissarov and Alexander Koreshkov both scored twice to earn Kazakhstan a comfortable 5-2 win over Netherlands, notching up a maximum of nine points out of three games at the IIHF (International Ice Hockey Federation) World Championship Division I Group A action staged on April 18.

Kazakhstan played a brilliant game of speed and skill, confining Holland to defense most of the time. The Kazakhs started a blitz to pull ahead just 53 seconds into the match from Komissarov's first goal.

Kazakhstan's second goal came from a penalty as Koreshkov slipped the puck past Dutch goalie Phillip Paul, establishing a 2-0 lead midway through the period. Komissarov netted his second goal just four minutes later. Just as the first period closed, Holland regrouped to net one goal from Van Den Braak in a clipping counterattack.

Koreshkov shot his second, taking on an assist from Komissarov, in the 17th minute of the second period and reset a three-goal advantage for the Kazakhs, but Bradley Smulders cut the deficit again to two goals just 1:07 later, capitalizing on a two minute one-man advantage. Lev Krutokhov's goal in the third period secured Kazakhstan's victory.

Kazakhstan outshot the Netherlands 45-15. A bevy of solid saves by Paul avoided a larger gap score against the Netherlands.

The victory did not get full credit from Kazakhstan's head coach Anatoliy Kartayev. "I don't think we played well in the first period. We underestimated our opponents and that's very dangerous in any match, but the players realized it just in time and played hard from the second period and finally nailed down the victory," he said.

The loss was not frustrating to Dutch coach Tommie Hartogs. "I think the result is absolutely acceptable and we gave our best in the game. The Kazakhs are much stronger than us, so they deserve the win. We will continue to play our best and that's enough for us," Hartogs said.

Kazakhstan piles up nine points in total and leads Group A. The group leaders can book a berth in the World Championship in Moscow and the last finishers will be demoted to Group B.

Things to Watch:

- Charles Symonyi, Hungarian born U.S. billionaire, who blasted into space from Baikonur Cosmodrome in south western Kazakhstan on April 7, becoming the world's fifth space "tourist", is expected to return to Earth with Expedition 14 from the International Space Station on April 21 at 08:30 a.m. EDT in the steppes of central Kazakhstan.

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