



Kazakhstan News Bulletin

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

August 4, 2006

Vol. 6, No. 29

In this issue:

CentCom Chief Visits Kazakhstan, Strengthens Military Ties

Reforms Will Raise Wages, Streamline Bureaucracy in Effort to Improve Operations and Combat Corruption

PBS to Produce Program on Kazakh Cycling

*Say it in Kazakh:
It's summer in Kazakhstan.
I would like an ice cream. ---
Balmuzdak zhegim kelip tur.
... an ice cream ---
Balmuzdak
... a cold drink ---
Salkyn susyn
... a light supper --
- Zhenil kieshke as*

Abizaid Visits Kazakhstan, Strengthens Military Ties

General John P. Abizaid, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, visited Kazakhstan on July 24 for talks with defense officials on ways to strengthen military ties between the two countries.

Kazakhstan-U.S. military ties were put on a solid footing with a five year cooperation program launched in 2003. It provides for the supply of U.S. military equipment and assistance to modernize Kazakh armed forces.

In Astana, Gen. Abizaid met Defense Minister Army General Mukhtar Altynbayev and other officials.

“We have a very good cooperation agreement with Kazakhstan,” which mostly concerns education, Gen. Abizaid told a news conference after the talks. He noted the United States was pleased with the improvements in the quality of the Kazakh armed forces, the growing professionalism of the Kazakh army, and was grateful for the work of a KazBat detachment in Iraq. In 2003, Kazakhstan became a strong ally for the United States in its efforts to bring peace to Iraq when Astana sent its troops to that country. Currently, the sixth contingent of Kazakh army engineers from the KazBat peacekeeping battalion continues to serve with distinction in Iraq destroying mines and other deadly ordnance, and passing their skills on to the Iraqis.

Gen. Abizaid said the United States considers ensuring security in Central Asia and on the Caspian Sea a priority. “Forces providing security in the region must be professional. There are many threats in the region, from terrorism to a significant narcotics problem which is always



Iraq bound...

A sergeant from the KazBat battalion kisses his little girl goodbye as he prepares to leave for dangerous duty in Iraq.



Kazakh army engineers prepare to safely dispose of several bombs in central Iraq.

accompanied with a lot of criminal activity and other threats to security. Provision of security in the Caspian region, including protection of the petroleum infrastructure is also important,” Gen. Abizaid noted.

The United States currently helps Kazakhstan in developing its new Navy on the Caspian Sea, primarily through the renovation of a Kazakhstan Naval Institute in the port city of Aktau.

“Our goal is to strengthen Kazakhstan’s defense capability on the Caspian, not to replace it,” Gen. Abizaid said noting the U.S. had no intention to set up new military bases in the region.

Regionally, the U.S. interests are focused on stabilizing neighboring Afghanistan. The United States seeks to expand military cooperation with Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia and looks for their help in Afghanistan, Gen. Abizaid explained.

“Over time, I would imagine that the level of cooperation would go up, but the level of [U.S. regional] presence will go down,” Gen. Abizaid said following his visit to Astana.

Reforms Will Raise Wages, Streamline Bureaucracy in Effort to Improve Operations and Combat Corruption

A planned administrative reform in Kazakhstan will raise salaries for public officials to levels similar to the private sector, will slash the number of positions filled by political appointees, and will institute the posts of permanent state secretaries in each ministry to ensure continuity during the reshuffles.

Coupled with other proposed measures, such as eliminating the doubling of functions of central ministries by local executive agencies and the introduction of a “small business ombudsman”, these reforms will help fight corruption and lead to a more streamlined and effective bureaucracy in Kazakhstan when they are introduced in 2007 and 2008.

Karim Massimov, Kazakhstan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Budget Planning presented key components of the proposed reforms at a special meeting of government officials in Astana on August 2.

Under the proposal, raising the salaries for public officials to levels comparable with Kazakhstan’s largest private companies will bridge the wage gap and provide additional incentives to eliminate corruption. As Kazakhstan has moved further along the road of untamed capitalism in the past decade private sector employees have tended to receive significantly higher wages compared to government employees with similar education and experience.

Another key proposal would reduce by half the number of layers of government officials, providing additional incentives for career growth and more efficient work.

One of the most important changes will affect the separation of powers between and within ministries. The ministries will keep regulatory functions, while implementation and control functions will be the responsibility of committees within each ministry.

“The ministries will have the functions of developing policies, making political decisions, preparing draft legislation and coordinating the activities of their committees. The committees within the ministries will be charged with implementing the policies and provide oversight and control on their own,” Massimov said.

To ensure continuity a new position of state secretary appointed by the President will be introduced in central government bodies. The position will be filled by a civil servant, not a political appointee, and is akin to a permanent under secretary in the British system of government.

A proposed Small Business Ombudsman will be responsible for making sure the interests of small businesses are duly protected. The Government sees the promotion of small business as a major component of the drive to broaden the basis of the economy and develop the middle class in the country as a pillar of democratic change.

Some of the proposals can be implemented as of January 1, 2007, while others will have to be prepared more thoroughly for introduction from 2008, Massimov explained.

PBS to Produce Program on Kazakh Cycling

Chris Baldwin, a New York based reporter from Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) has told Kazakh media PBS is producing a program on cycling in Kazakhstan, focusing on the story of Alexander Vinokourov, Kazakhstan’s most renowned cyclist.

“Our goal is to present Kazakhstan as a whole to an American audience through cycling,” Baldwin said in an interview with the Kazakhstan Today news agency. He added Vinokourov is very popular in the United States, and “when three years ago he participated in a one day race called Grand San Francisco, many Americans routed for him.” Baldwin said many Americans don’t know anything about Vinokourov’s country of origin, and sportscasters sometimes call him either a Russian or a German cyclist.

Baldwin said Kazakhstan is known in America through President Nursultan Nazarbayev, cyclist Alexander Vinokourov, and a scandalous fictitious character of a Kazakh reporter, Borat Sagdiyev, played by a British comedian. “Nobody believes Borat anymore, and he is not as popular as he used to be,” Baldwin added.

The PBS team has already visited Petropavlovsk, the home town of Vinokourov, and taped interviews with his first coaches. They are currently shooting footage in Pavlodar, where Kazakhstan’s long distance race *Priirtysh’e 2006* began on August 2 with the participation of many strong young cyclists.

The half-hour program on Kazakh cycling is expected to be aired on PBS soon, Baldwin said.

Things to Watch:

- President Nursultan Nazarbayev is expected to visit the United States in the fall of 2006.
- KazZhelDorTrans, a domestic subsidiary of the Kazakhstan Temir Zholy (Railways), is expected to list its shares on both the London and the Kazakh stock exchanges in 2007.

For back issues, other news and information visit us at www.kazakhembus.com
News Bulletin of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
Contact person: Roman Vassilenko
1401 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202 232 5488, ext. 104, Fax: 202 232 5845