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In this issue:

Kazakh Soldiers “Honored” to Train Iraqis as President Says They Will Continue “Historic Mission”

Giant Tent to Provide Relief from Astana’s Winters

Kazakh Scientists Create Bird Flu Vaccine

Sardar Joins Kazakh Coast Guard

In a Strange Message, Britons Urge Kazakhs Not to Eat Meat

Kazakh Soldiers “Honored” to Train Iraqis as President Says They Will Continue Historic Mission

Major Zhanibek K. Kutzhanov, commander of the Kazakh army engineers in Iraq, said he and his troops are “greatly honored to have an opportunity to share our military expertise with soldiers of the Iraqi army,” as President Nursultan Nazarbayev pledged Kazakhstan’s continued commitment to the mission in Iraq.

Maj. Kutzhanov leads a group of 27 Kazakh soldiers, based in the vicinity of El Kut, central Iraq. The current group is the sixth contingent from Kazakhstan, and such contingents rotate every six months. Almost a third of the Kazakh group in Iraq now are doing their second tour.

The Kazakhs in Iraq have already destroyed more than four million pieces of deadly ordnance and cleared dozens of sources of water.

Since last year, when the impetus shifted toward training the Iraqis, Kazakh soldiers have trained more than 200 Iraqi troops in mine disposal and 20 locals in water purification techniques.

“Our mission in Iraq is an opportunity to help build peace in this troubled nation. This is a historic mission for us because this is the first time Kazakhstan participates in a peacekeeping mission as part of the coalition forces, and it is an opportunity to show the Kazakh Army’s professional readiness,” Maj. Kutzhanov said.



Staff Sergeant Dauren Togaybayev (left) of Kazakh contingent trains an Iraqi soldier in mine disposal in this December 2006 photo.

Top U.S. commanders in Iraq, and the Iraqi government officials, have repeatedly praised the Kazakhs for their service honoring them with medals. The Kazakhs have established “good and respectful relations with other coalition troops,” Maj. Kutzhanov noted.

On a recent visit to London, President Nursultan Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan will support the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq as long as its assistance is needed for securing peace and stability there. President Nazarbayev said, “We could argue a lot about why we went in, why we shouldn’t have gone in, but we know that given this situation we now need to see the thing through to the end. That is the main thing.”

Meanwhile, as his troops look toward the holiday season in a foreign country, Maj. Kutzhanov noted that “our thoughts do go back to our families.” To help stay in touch with the relatives, the Kazakhs try to use the Internet as much as they can. “But we don’t have much time to miss them though, as our tasks keep us busy most of the time,” Maj. Kutjanov said.

He added his troops like the food they have in Iraq, but “are sometimes missing national dishes.”

Giant Tent to Provide Relief from Astana’s Winters

By the beginning of 2008, Astana’s residents may be able to enjoy a pleasant afternoon outdoors, even in the harshest winters, by taking refuge under a giant, 500 foot high transparent tent.

Designed by the renowned British architect Norman Foster, the dome will be made of a transparent material that absorbs and retains sunlight. Winter temperatures in Astana can reach as low as minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, but inside the tent they will instead stay at a near constant 60 degrees.



The tent will contain a “miniature city” roughly the size of ten football stadiums. Underneath the dome, residents will relax around cafes, shopping centers, canals, and a nine hole golf course. Additionally the dome will contain artificial beaches and a concert hall to seat 5,000.

“Nothing of this sort has ever been done before, and from the engineering point of view, it’s an extremely difficult project,” said Fetta Tamince, the head partner of Sembol, the Turkish development company constructing the tent.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev revealed a three dimensional model of the tent, which will be named Khan Shatyr, after the tent like structures used by Genghis Khan and his descendents in the 13th century.

Astana became the country’s capital in 1997. Located in northern central Kazakhstan, Astana has experienced an astonishing construction boom since that time with a completely new city growing on the left bank of the Ishim river complete with skyscrapers, huge apartment buildings, embassies, and a glass and steel pyramid of Palace of Peace and Harmony, also designed by Foster. Astana’s population more than doubled since 1997 to close to 700,000 now, making it the second largest city in the country after Almaty, its former capital.

Nazarbayev, who spearheaded the decision to move Kazakhstan’s capital, believed that Astana held greater potential for future development than a picturesque Almaty in the foothills of the Tian Shan mountains, which is hemmed in by those mountains and located near the country’s eastern border.

December 10 marked the ninth anniversary of Astana as Kazakhstan’s capital. In a BBC interview this week, Nazarbayev said that he is pleased with the progress that has been made over the past nine years and that he considers Astana one of his biggest successes. “I put everything at stake, including my career and my name. It was a huge risk, and I took it intuitively,” Nazarbayev said.

More information about Khan Shatyr is available at www.khanshatyry.com.

Kazakh Scientists Create Bird Flu Vaccine

Byrganym Aitimova, Kazakhstan’s Minister of Education and Science announced on December 14 that Kazakh scientists created the first national bird flu vaccine to be used on birds.

“Immune and biological characteristics of the vaccine developed in Kazakhstan is on par with those of foreign analogues,” the Minister said. Currently, an experimental series of the vaccine, called Kazakhstan-15, is ready and was registered with the veterinary department of the country’s Ministry of Agriculture.

Seidigappar Mamadaliev, Director of the Research Institute of Biological Safety, noted the Kazakh vaccine is different from foreign analogues in that “it is based on H5N1 pathogen and is the most epidemiologically relevant.” In July 2005, experts of his institute were able to retrieve the pathogen from birds in the Pavlodar region of Kazakhstan which died from the virus.

“We believe we are not ready for an international certificate for this vaccine, but will definitely do so next year when we achieve greater reproductive characteristics for the drug,” Mamadaliev noted. He added the institute is planning to ship vaccine abroad, including throughout Central Asia, Afghanistan and beyond.

Erlan Ramankulov, Director General of Kazakhstan’s National Biotechnology Center, which oversees the research institute, said at the press conference: “It took less than half a year to develop this vaccine whereas experts typically expect two years for the development, tests, registration and preparation of scientific and technical documentation for a vaccine. What we achieved cannot be termed a discovery, but it can be considered an achievement of our science.”

Ramankulov said Kazakh scientists can also work on creating a bird flu vaccine for humans. “If the government commissions such a vaccine, we will work to create such a vaccine for humans. Creating such a vaccine requires serious resources on a scale much higher than what was allocated for this vaccine for animals.”

***Sardar* Joins Kazakh Coast Guard**

Sardar, a 195 ton cutter for Kazakhstan’s border guards on the Caspian Sea, was commissioned in December.

Sardar, built at Kazakhstan’s Zenith defense plant in Uralsk on the Ural River, sailed down the river and into the sea and was tested at Bautino port before being called to duty at the Aktau seaport.

She can withstand a force seven storm and is able to be on duty independently for 10 days. Organizationally, *Sardar*, armed with a gun, a machine gun as well as automatic satellite communication equipment, is part of the Batys (West) Directorate of the Border Guard Service of Kazakhstan’s National Security Committee (KNB). *Sardar* is expected to work closely with posts of technical observation in the Caspian as well as the naval aviation.

The Caspian Sea is bordered by five countries, including (clockwise) Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. The sea is known for two “black gold” staples, huge oil resources and the world’s largest caviar-producing population of sturgeon. Kazakhstan’s sector of the sea is believed to be especially rich in oil and is the site for Kashagan, the largest oil find in the last thirty years. The cutter will add to security for Kazakhstan’s rapidly developing oil production in the Caspian.

Meanwhile, the Zenith plant is getting ready to produce a cutter similar to *Sardar*, but with a displacement of 240 tons.

In a Strange Message, Britons Urge Kazakhs Not to Eat Meat

Two British animal rights activists dressed in lettuce bikinis braved the winter chill in the Kazakh commercial capital Almaty on December 12 to urge Kazakhs to stop eating meat and turn vegetarian.

The activists from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, said they were inspired by the spoof movie “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” but said their message was positive.

“We come with a positive message: how to live a healthier, longer life,” said Yvonne Taylor, one of the two Lettuce Ladies, her teeth chattering as they stood in Almaty’s main square in freezing temperatures, as reported by the Associated Press.

In a statement, PETA said, “The scantily clad beauties are asking the people of Almaty to mark the

New Year by switching from dishes like beshbarmak (horse meat and noodles) and zhambas (baked sheep's head) to healthy and humane meatless alternatives.” (For the record, baked sheep's head is called *bas*, while *zhambas* refers to a thigh, which is also served for distinguished guests.)



Britons Yvonne Taylor (L), 35, and Lucy Groom, 27, from campaign group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), hold a protest to urge Kazakhs to go vegetarian near the Independence monument in Almaty December 12, 2006. REUTERS/Shamil Zhumatov

The activists held small Kazakh national flags and signs that read: “Let Vegetarianism Grow in You.”

“We are OK, just about,” said activist Lucy Groom by the end of their 30 minute action. “We are suffering because we care about animals. We believe that people of Kazakhstan also care about animals.”

While some thought the colorful protest was fun, others were angered. “This is a disgrace,” said 74-year-old Orazbek Ziyakhanov of the activists’ outfits. “Don’t we have enough of our own spoiled girls? This is not Europe, this is Asia.” As for becoming a vegetarian, Ziyakhanov said, “How can we stop eating meat? All the vitamins are in meat.”

Such views found resonance in other knowledgeable Kazakhs of different origins, and even some non-Kazakhs.

While there are at least 100 different ethnic cuisines in Kazakhstan, courtesy of a history which created a very diverse population, few of them are known for their vegetarianism. “Kazakhs do love their meat,” observed U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns in a recent interview for Kazakhstan’s Khabar TV. He added that he liked whatever dish he tried on his two trips to Kazakhstan this year.

The ethnic Kazakhs have traditionally been nomads, and horses, as well as sheep, were the main providers for their very existence. Meat, and nutrients found in it, have for millennia been the food staple of the locals as they braved demanding lifestyles and harsh winters. While eating horsemeat may sound inhumane for some, certain horses in Kazakhstan, just as in France and even Texas, are specifically raised for meat, just like cows and buffalo.

For British activists, however beautiful and unusual in their lettuce bikinis on a winter day, to promote abstinence from meat in such a carnivorous country is something akin to preaching to the Chinese to stop eating rice and soy sauce or urging the Texans to stop eating steaks.

Those interested can find some recipes of the Kazakh cuisine at <http://www.kazakhembus.com/Cuisine.html>.

Things to Watch:

- Fifteen million people in Kazakhstan will celebrate the 15th anniversary of the country’s independence on December 16. Major festivities are planned across the country.
- President Nursultan Nazarbayev will visit China December 19 to 23 for talks with leaders of Kazakhstan’s eastern neighbor on expanding economic and political ties. China already is one of Kazakhstan’s largest trading partners.

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Contact person: Roman Vassilenko
1401 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202 232 5488, ext. 104, Fax: 202 232 5845