



Kazakhstan News Bulletin

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

December 8, 2006

Vol. 6, No. 44

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KazBat Becomes KazBrig as Kazakhstan Seeks Greater International Peacekeeping Responsibilities

Kazakhstan has expanded its flagship peacekeeping battalion into a full brigade to include several battalions as the rapidly developing Central Asian country seeks and welcomes greater international peacekeeping responsibilities. Created on December 2, KazBrig, or Kazakhstan Brigade, formerly KazBat, or Kazakhstan Battalion, will remain the foundation of Kazakhstan’s contribution to the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq.

Kazakh army engineers from KazBat have been on duty in Iraq since 2003. They already destroyed more than four million pieces of deadly ordnance and cleared scores of sources of water. Since last year, when the impetus shifted toward training the Iraqi forces, Kazakh soldiers have trained more than 200 Iraqis in mine disposal and 20 locals in water purification techniques. The Kazakhs forces have also provided medical assistance to 2,500 Iraqi civilians and coalition troops and conducted 2,000 surgical operations.

The newly expanded Kazakh Brigade has stronger sapper and medical components and a larger share of English speaking officers and soldiers than KazBat. With these additional resources, KazBrig is getting ready to play a larger international role.

“KazBrig has greater capabilities to fulfill peacekeeping tasks in light of the experience already gained. The new peacekeeping brigade is fully equipped according to NATO standards, and its engineer and medical components have been strengthened,” Kazakhstan’s Defense Ministry said in a statement announcing the creation of KazBrig.

Leaders of the Defense Ministry and KazBrig, based at Kapshagai, a town 45 miles north of Almaty, consider English



Kaisha Murzamadiyeva and world champion Jeff Smith. See story on page 5.

language training for the brigade's officers and soldiers a top priority and send dozens of them for training at both local and international facilities. Yerlan Talasbayev, Commandant of Kazakhstan's Military Institute of Foreign Languages, said his institute prepares annually 150 English speaking servicemen. Others get trained at facilities in the United States and European members of NATO, he added.

Additionally, some Kazakh troops currently on mission in Iraq also speak Arabic, and are in greater demand in light of expanding training activities. In September 2006, Kazakhstan conducted the rotation of its soldiers in Iraq, and currently a new group continues its mission.

“Kazakhstan is NATO’s Key Central Asian Partner”, Says NATO Secretary General

On the first leg of a three day trip to the capital of the European Union this week, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev met with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who pronounced Kazakhstan “NATO's most active partner working under an individual cooperation plan.”

The secretary general thanked Nazarbayev for Kazakhstan's contribution to NATO's military mission in Afghanistan and for the country's efforts to improve security in the region.

“Kazakhstan is a very active participant in regional cooperation in terms of both political and social spheres. I am sure that this visit of the Kazakh president will give impetus to the further development of cooperation between NATO and the Republic of Kazakhstan,” de Hoop Scheffer said.

“Cooperation with NATO is needed for the development of our army, and we will continue to work in this area,” Nazarbayev said. “The dialogue between our country and the North Atlantic alliance has already been developing for over 10 years,” he said.

During the talks, the leaders discussed improving international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, enhancing regional and global security, and developing military, technical, and political partnerships.

After their meeting, Nazarbayev and de Hoop Scheffer visited NATO headquarters to attend a photo exhibition devoted to the 15th anniversary of the closing of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing facilities.

From 1949 to 1989, the Soviet Union detonated more than 450 nuclear explosions in the Semipalatinsk facilities, causing irreparable harm to the people living there and the local environment. Nazarbayev played an instrumental role in closing the facilities in 1991.

In other parts of his visit, Nazarbayev signed energy agreements with the European Union, lobbied for his country to chair the OSCE in 2009 and met with several European leaders.

Kazakhstan’s Drive to Chair OSCE Strengthens

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) parliamentary assembly recommended that the organization hold its 2008 annual meeting in Kazakhstan, significantly increasing Kazakhstan's chances for becoming the OSCE chairman in 2009.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Brussels this week to campaign for his country to hold this leadership position at the 14th session of the Council of the OSCE foreign ministers held in the Belgian capital.

“Kazakhstan enjoys peace and coexistence between a diverse population of 130 different nationalities and 46 different religions for the last 15 years. I think this would be a very valuable experience that might be shared by the OSCE,” Nazarbayev said.

The final decision on the 2009 chairmanship will be determined in December 2007, when Spain becomes the next OSCE chairman.

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE would send a “positive signal to Kazakh authorities to complete [democratic and human-rights] reforms.”

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kassym-Jomart Tokaev said that Kazakhstan is already drafting reforms that will strengthen democratic elections, improve freedom of the media, and give NGO's a more powerful voice. He also said that Kazakhstan has worked to implement previous reform efforts recommended by the OSCE.

"We took the first step towards carrying out the "roadmap", which was adopted in Ljubljana in 2005. In compliance with the OSCE's ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) recommendations the amendments were made to legislation and local self-government reforms were carried out," Tokaev said.

The world's largest regional security organization, the OSCE has 55 member nations. OSCE chairmanship rotates annually, with a country's foreign minister serving as chair. Previous and succeeding chairs also assume leadership roles.

Kazakhstan Builds Energy Partnership with Europe

Kazakhstan and the European Union agreed this week to import oil and natural gas from Kazakhstan to the EU and to promote nuclear energy within Kazakhstan.

"Kazakhstan and the European Union have laid the foundations of constructive cooperation in the energy sector," said the EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, who held talks with President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

"Common values, a high pace of trade and economic cooperation as well as joint moves to ensure energy security are the basis of our partnership," Nazarbayev said.

Specific points of the agreement include improving energy security, regularly exchanging energy-policy information and developing environmentally clean technologies.

The Kazakh-EU agreement will also broaden both the EU's and Kazakhstan's energy platforms. By importing oil and natural gas from Kazakhstan, the EU will become less dependent upon suppliers from Russia and the Middle East. Kazakhstan, which has 20% of the world's uranium reserves, will gain access to a new energy source.

Additionally, the Central Asian nation will work with the EU to develop newer, more efficient oil and natural gas pipelines.

"I would like to assure you that any route which is feasible and efficient for transportation of Kazakh hydrocarbons will be thoroughly considered," Nazarbayev said.

During their meeting, Nazarbayev and Barroso also discussed Nazarbayev's strategies to make Kazakhstan one of the 50 most competitive countries in the world and to diversify its economy.

Kazakhstan and Russia Launch Uranium Venture

Kazakh and Russian officials on Thursday inaugurated a joint venture that will mine uranium to make fuel for Russian-designed nuclear reactors, Kazakhstan's national atomic company said.

The Zarechnoye mine in southern Kazakhstan contains 19,000 tons of uranium and is expected to produce 1,000 tons of uranium annually by 2009, KazAtomProm said.

Under deals struck earlier this year Kazakhstan and Russia are planning to create two more joint ventures: one to build a nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan with a capacity of 300 megawatts and another, in Russia, that will enrich uranium for atomic power stations.

The cost of the projects has not been announced. KazAtomProm and Russia's Tekhnabeksport each own 49.33 in the Zarechnoye venture. Russia's Atomredmetzoloto and Kyrgyzstan's Kara Balta ore-mining complex each own a 0.67 percent stake in the project.

Kazakh Prime Minister Daniyal Akhmetov and Russian Atomic Agency Chief Sergei Kiriyyenko launched the project in a special inaugurating ceremony Thursday.

Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic in Central Asia, has 30 percent of the world's proven uranium reserves and is currently the third largest uranium producer, according to KazAtomProm.

KazAtomProm plans to boost production more than fourfold by 2010 to 15,000 metric tons and become the world's largest uranium producer. In 2005, it produced 4,300 metric tons of uranium.

Kazakhstan's Gold and Foreign Exchange Reserves Increase by 7.8 Percent in November 2006

The National Bank of Kazakhstan announced this week that Kazakhstan's gold and foreign exchange reserves grew 7.8% in November to \$23.8 billion.

Kazakhstan's gold and foreign exchange reserves include both reserves at the National Bank and assets of Kazakhstan's National Fund, a savings fund accumulating excess revenue from Kazakhstan's mineral extraction industries. National Fund reserves amounted to \$13.2 billion at the end of November, the bank announced.

Some of this increase resulted from a global increase in the price of gold in November. Gold prices increased by 6.2%, resulting in a net increase of \$168 million in gold assets.

The November increase, however, represents a continuing trend. Gold and foreign exchange reserves grew by 5.2% in October, and have increased by 22% over the past six months.

Kazakhstan operates on a two-tiered banking system. The National Bank of Kazakhstan, the upper tier, is the country's central bank and represents Kazakhstan's interests relating to smaller banks, banks of other countries, international banks, and finance and credit organizations.

From Kazakhstan, with Vodka: Snow Queen Vodka Comes to Washington Just In Time for the Holidays

Here is the December 1 press release of Kazakh Vodka Ltd.

Award Winning Vodka Known for Its Purity, Lauded by Critics and Celebrities; Now Available in Washington's Top 30 Hospitality Venues

Washington, DC – Kazakh Vodka proudly announces the launch of Snow Queen vodka in the Washington, DC Market. Currently available in Washington's top hospitality destinations, the critically acclaimed vodka has quickly become the in-demand drink for Washington vodka connoisseurs from Café Milano to Café Saint-Ex.

Quickly gaining an international reputation as the best non-flavored vodka in the world, Snow Queen vodka has been a mainstay amongst celebrities and dignitaries from Scarlet Johansson to Mick Jagger to Prince William. Snow Queen is currently the best-selling brand at Harrods and Selfridges in London, as well as in the duty free sections of Heathrow and Gatwick, and top United Kingdom night clubs and restaurants such as Chinawhite, Cocoon, Nobu Berkeley, Momo and Movida.

Based on international demand, a United States launch plan was moved ahead of schedule. In addition to Washington, Snow Queen vodka is now available in New York, Chicago, Miami and the Caribbean, with a nationwide rollout staging over the coming year.

"We are thrilled with the incredible reception that Snow Queen has received in the nation's capital," said Rowland Hill, CEO of Snow Queen vodka. "Snow Queen has fast become the vodka of choice for so many important Washingtonians, and while this is no surprise based on the quality of our product, we are delighted with the rapidity in which this has occurred."

Since its launch, Snow Queen vodka has been highly involved with charities by sponsoring events such as The Rammy Awards and The Jolly Holly Young Benefactors Gala of the Smithsonian in Washington, The Fashion Group International Night of Stars in Chicago, The White Party in Miami and the Unicef Gala in New York.

Snow Queen vodka has been lauded for its quality from publications worldwide, from the Sunday

Telegraph in the United Kingdom (“...clean and incisive, with smooth, rounded flavors too good to waste on cocktails”) to Time Out Chicago (“Don’t waste the time by mixing—go for a straight-up martini”).

The heralded quality of Snow Queen vodka stems from its Kazakhstani craftsmanship. Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world and the sixth-largest producer of grain. Grain vodkas are found to be the superior sipping vodkas versus their cheaper potato-crafted counterparts.

To craft Snow Queen, Kazakh Vodka uses only organic wheat and artisan spring water from the foothills of the Himalayas. Using only Kazakh birch charcoal in its superior distillation process (a five-time distillation procedure making Snow Queen one of the highest distilled vodkas available), Snow Queen Vodka is one of the purest and smoothest vodkas in the world. Its production by Kazakh Vodka, one of the world’s largest producers of vodkas, also makes it a superb value amongst super premium brands.

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For additional information or to schedule an interview with Snow Queen CEO Rowland Hill, please contact Barbara Martin at barbara@thepattongroupinc.com, 301.512.5078.

About Kazakh Vodka Ltd.

Kazakh Vodka Ltd., makers of Snow Queen, is owned by Geom Ltd., based in Kazakhstan. Geom Ltd. has over 60 brands and produces 200 million bottles of vodka per year with nearly a third being consumed in the United Kingdom alone. Kazakh vodkas brands are the leading sellers in Moscow, with Snow Queen being the preferred super premium vodka. For more information, please visit www.snowqueenvodka.com.

Embassy Kid Gets Black Belt from World Champ

Kaisha Murzamadiyeva, the 10-year-old daughter of Mainura Murzamadiyeva, the Embassy’s economics counselor, got promoted to a black belt in Tae Kwon Do at a club at Falls Church, VA earlier this year.

The club is run by Jeff Smith, the former world champion in karate. Upon receiving her belt, Kaisha shared her feelings about her success: “I am very excited about getting a black belt, and it means a lot to me. Tae Kwon Do made me a better person. Going to Jeff Smith Karate down the street makes me excited because I get to do martial arts with my new friends there. Because I have more friends, I am more social which I guess makes me a better person.”

Kaisha had warm words for her instructors, too: “The teachers are fun to work with. They can be your friends too. It is fun going to a place where most of the people are your friends.”

Congratulations, Kaisha!

Things to Watch:

- The more than 600,000 people living in Astana will mark the 9th anniversary of its transformation into a capital of an independent Kazakhstan on December 10, 1997.
- 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 is expected to visit China in the second part of December for talks with its leaders on expanding economic and political ties. China already is one of Kazakhstan’s largest trading partners.

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