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Say it in Kazakh:

Mountain --- tau;

Steppe --- dala;

Desert --- shul;

Forest --- orman;

Lake --- kol;

River --- uzen;

Sea --- teniz [tien-
ghyz]

Russia Approves Baikonur Deal with Kazakhstan

President Vladimir Putin of Russia signed into law a bill ratifying an agreement with Kazakhstan on cooperation and the use of the Baikonur cosmodrome on June 20.

The agreement was signed in Astana in January 2004. It provides for the extension of Russia's lease of Baikonur until the year 2050 and increased cooperation between the two countries in modernizing the cosmodrome and building the Baiterek joint space complex. The first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, was launched into space from Baikonur in 1961.

The agreement also provides for joint environmental research and protection at the cosmodrome, an important component of the cooperative effort.

Kazakhstan to Develop National Anti-Drug Program

Zautbek Turysbekov, Kazakhstan's Minister of Internal Affairs has announced the government will develop a National Anti-Drug Program to help fight the ever growing problem of drug abuse and trafficking.

Minister Turysbekov, speaking at the opening ceremony for a new dog training center of the Ministry, expressed hope drug detection dogs will be trained there to help law enforcement fight drug trafficking more effectively.

The Minister said three to five people die daily because of drugs just in Almaty, the largest city in the country with the population of 1.5 million, adding six channels of drug trafficking have been discovered in Kazakhstan. News media routinely report on seizures of large consignments of heroin and opium originating in Afghanistan.

During the past several years, Kazakhstan has become one of the drug trafficking routes from heroin smuggled from Afghanistan through Central Asia and on to Russia and Europe. The problem of drug trafficking has been growing continuously.



The Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*), a rare species found in Kazakhstan is to be the focus of the new preservation drive.

See story page 2. Photo by Anna Lushchekina

It has implications for both crime and health situations in Kazakhstan. Drug traffickers not only commit crimes by smuggling drugs, they also tend to pay their local helpers in kind which promotes the use of drugs in Kazakhstan.

Kazakh officials have long urged the U.S. and the international community to continue their assistance to Afghanistan in fighting poppy production in that country where it serves as a major source of financing for terrorists and provides the lion's share of heroin sold in Europe.

***The Nomads* Set to Premier in Astana and Almaty in July, Miramax to Distribute Movie in U.S. and English Speaking World**

Sergei Azimov, Director General of Kazakhfilm, the National Film Company, announced *The Nomads*, an epic movie about the Kazakhs' brave struggle against foreign invaders in the Middle Ages, will premier in Astana and Almaty in early July. Miramax Pictures will distribute the film in English speaking markets around the world.

The \$33 million movie, the most expensive ever shot in Kazakhstan, was created by an international team of 500 people including directors, producers and actors from Kazakhstan, the United States and Europe. Following the premiere, it will begin screening across Kazakhstan in the fall of 2005.

Miramax distribution company bought the screening rights for the movie in English-speaking countries at the 58th Cannes Festival last month. The company is currently spending US\$1.5 million to translate the movie soundtrack into English and many more millions on promoting the movie in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and other countries. The movie is expected to be shown in at least 500 movie theaters across the world, the largest screening yet for any movie produced in the former Soviet Union. No date for the international premiere has been announced yet.

Kazakh Volleyball Team Qualifies for 2006 World Cup

Kazakhstan's men's volleyball team qualified for the 2006 World Championship finals to be held in Japan in November next year.

During the qualifying tournament held in Almaty, Kazakhstan's former capital last week, the host team beat opposition from the United Arab Emirates and South Korea who was considered a favorite to clinch the top spot.

Earlier this month, Rakhat CSKA of Almaty for the first time in the club's history won the Asian Volleyball Club Championship in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Nurtai Abykayev, the Speaker of Kazakhstan's Senate and the President of Kazakhstan's Volleyball Federation congratulated both teams praising their "outstanding performance". He called the World Cup qualification "a major achievement and a stimulus for national volleyball."

Saiga Population Plummet, Urgent Help Required

The population of ancient antelopes known as *Saiga tatarica* in Kazakhstan has plummeted during recent years, requiring urgent attention of conservationists to prevent it from disappearing altogether.

An international expedition of experts visited areas of Saiga habitat this month to investigate possible ways for reversing the trend of recent years in Kazakhstan.

Tatyana Bragina, a representative of the World Wide Fund for Nature, said the expedition included scientists from major European environmental protection agencies. The delegation visited the Kostanai and South Kazakhstan regions which both have steppes, the natural habitat of the Saiga. Saigas traditionally live in Kazakhstan, the Russian steppes of Kalmykiya, as well Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia.

Ms. Bragina said "the foreign scientists were stunned by the well preserved wild steppes in areas they surveyed" in Kazakhstan. George Schwede, who runs the World Wide Fund for Nature programs in

Europe and Central Asia, noted wild steppes are useful for not only restoring the population of endangered species, but also for bringing in native animals native from that part of the world. Among such animals is kulan, a type of ancient horse, which disappeared in the Kostanai region, but could be brought from Turkmenistan and reintroduced.

The international delegation also met officials at the ministries of agriculture and environmental protection and the committee on forestry and hunting, as well as local administrators. Ms. Bragina said the meetings focused on ways to join efforts to protect the environment. Foreign foundations represented on the trip decided to join their efforts and create a directorate to coordinate the ecologists' activities.

The World Wide Fund for Nature, a global conservation organization, said in a 2004 position statement "Saiga antelope populations numbered over one million as recently as the early 1990s, but have been reduced to no more than 40,000 in total." The report noted "poaching and illegal trade in horns, uncontrolled hunting for meat, destruction of habitat, and construction of irrigation channels, roads and other obstacles preventing natural dispersion and migration have all contributed to recent Saiga population declines. However, the primary cause is excessive illegal hunting even though hunting for Saiga is prohibited in all range states namely Kazakhstan (1999), Russian Federation (1998), Turkmenistan (1994), Uzbekistan (1990), and Mongolia. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources has recently re-categorized the species as Critically Endangered."

The report noted "continuing large-scale impoverishment of the rural population has led to extensive poaching of Saiga for meat and horns (for use in traditional Asian medicine). This has been facilitated by the breakdown of the government anti-poaching system as well liberalization of foreign trade, following the breakdown of the USSR. Before 1991, all foreign trade was fully under the control and monopoly of the state but subsequently numerous private companies and individuals were allowed to establish export/import operations. Simultaneously, border controls were weakened, thus allowing the development of hundreds of exporting businesses, without effective regulation of the exported products."

The report notes "both Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation have already taken positive steps in enhancing conservation efforts, such as the voluntary suspension of exports of Saiga specimens. Nevertheless, populations have continued to decline, in some areas precipitously. In order to improve the protection of the Saiga antelope and their habitat within each range State, there is an urgent need for enhanced regional and international cooperation."

Things to Watch:

- The upper and lower houses of the Parliament of Kazakhstan will meet in a joint session June 27. The members will discuss topics including the date for the next presidential election and will hear Igor Rogov, Chairman of the Constitutional Council, speak on this issue.
- Presidents of Kazakhstan, China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are expected to meet in early July at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana. Trade and security cooperation will be major items on their agenda.
- *Photomodel 2005*, the Kazakh national beauty contest, will take place in Almaty July 15.

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