



# Kazakhstan News Bulletin

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## **Kazakh Security Chief Says Drug Emergency Growing, Cooperation Is Key to Defeating Scourge**

General Amangeldy Shabdarbayev, Chairman of Kazakhstan's National Security Committee said his agency is leading a rapidly intensifying fight against drug trafficking and called for greater international cooperation in fighting this scourge threatening to undermine his country's growing prosperity and Central Asia's stability.

In a March 2 interview with *Kazakhstan Today* news agency, Gen. Shabdarbayev who has led Kazakhstan's main security agency for a year, said "a wide geographic spread of production and sale of drugs, different forms and methods of their trafficking, and persistent transnational ties among international drug groups all require a coordinated approach from every interested party."

According to Gen. Shabdarbayev, the KNB, as his agency is known for its local acronym, has so far eliminated 10 drug rings, 21 channels for international and regional drug trafficking, and captured more than one ton of heroin and opium, not to mention much larger quantities of hashish. Since one gram of heroin is enough for five to seven individual doses, that means "we eliminated up to 7 million doses of this lethal poison," the General explained.

He said Kazakh agents work closely with colleagues from Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in fighting drug trafficking, mostly coming out on a northbound route from Afghanistan, and have recently seized 245 kilograms of heroin and 430 kilograms of opium in joint operations. As part of one operation, the Moscow Vector, one drug ring of Uzbek citizens was disrupted with agents seizing a courier carrying 117 kilograms of heroin and 27 kilograms of opium in a concealed compartment of his truck's fuel tank.

Kazakh news media reports of drug seizures across the country, appearing almost weekly, point to a growing emergency with drug trafficking. Especially worrisome to many is that in addition to mind-boggling amounts of drugs being seized and the audacity of drug traffickers willing to transport huge loads of banned substance, drugs easily corrupt local populace and officials in the police and other law enforcement agencies.



The high mountain Medeo ice rink is one of many modern attractions in Almaty, Kazakhstan's most populous city.

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According to Gen. Shabdarbayev, in 2006 alone 13 cases of involvement of police and prison administrators were uncovered which involved 33 officers, including eight top ranking officials. The problem received a higher profile still when President Nursultan Nazarbayev launched a special component of the country's drug fighting strategy called "Astana without Drugs."

The troubling news from the drug fighting front in Kazakhstan and the call for greater international cooperation from the country's security chief could not have been more timely.

In a March 6 interview with *The New York Times*, Antonio Maria Costa, Director of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, said this year Afghanistan's opium harvest could be bigger than last year's record crop, with nearly half of the provinces showing an increase in planting.

Afghanistan produces 92 percent of the world's opium, the main ingredient for heroin, according Mr. Costa's office. It is then smuggled across the country's borders with Pakistan, Iran, and Tajikistan, for destinations in Europe and elsewhere.

Afghanistan had a substantial increase of poppy cultivation last year, resulting in the highest recorded harvest, more than 6,000 tons.

Although some of the country is showing a decrease in poppy cultivation this year, the south, which has been plagued by the insurgency and traditionally has been the biggest source of poppies, is showing a continued increase, "which may result in an overall increase in opium poppy cultivation in 2007," the report from the UN Office for Drugs and Crime noted.

"The real increase is taking place in the provinces characterized by insurgency, and the problem there is not only a narcotic problem but an insurgency problem," Mr. Costa, based in Vienna, said in the interview. "The southern provinces are a textbook case of lawlessness prevailing, and therefore everybody from farmers and labs, traffickers and warlords are trying to profit from the bonanza of the product."

He described relatively successful efforts to wean some Afghan farmers away from growing poppies through cash and agricultural aid in other provinces as part of a strategy to "establish a stronghold of opium-free, or provinces with a negligible amount, and then slowly regain control of the other provinces." Costa warned though that lack of security prevents his agency from delivering help and convincing other farmers to switch from poppies, and said about US\$1 billion worth of last year's opium did not reach the world market and was probably held up by big traffickers waiting for the opium price to go up again.

## **Kazakhstan and Egypt Seek Expanded Trade**

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Egypt March 12 and 13 accompanied by a large trade delegation for talks with President Hosni Mubarak and other officials on promoting economic and cultural ties between the two countries.

Following the visit, Kazakhstan's and Egypt's trade and industry ministers Galym Orazbakov and Rashid Muhammed Rashid signed a bilateral trade agreement. Another agreement created an Egyptian-Kazakh business council which held its first large public business forum during the visit.

Trade is indeed the biggest story in the relations between the two countries these days. Addressing the business forum, President Nazarbayev noted positive trends in trade and economic ties and said prospects looked even more promising: "Kazakhstan has already shipped the first consignment of grain to Egypt and its imports [by Egypt] will soon reach one million tons annually. Because of that, our trade will grow from 90 million dollars last year to 150 million dollars this year, and we will continue to actively promote grain exports from Kazakhstan." The President added that a grain terminal has already been built for Kazakh grains in Baku, Azerbaijan, on the Caspian Sea, a similar one will be built in Georgia on the Black Sea, and proposed constructing another one and a flour mill in one of Egypt's Mediterranean ports.

President Nazarbayev said Kazakh investors are willing to invest in Egypt while the Kazakh Government will welcome Egyptian businesses.

“We are ready to invest in building hotels in Sharm-El-Sheikh. Big opportunities are available in our cooperation in creating and developing a cotton cluster in the south of Kazakhstan. We will also welcome Egyptian businesses into cotton processing industries in Kazakhstan. There are also good opportunities for our partnership in Kazakhstan’s pharmaceutical industry,” the President said.

He then offered to develop a “roadmap” for the two countries cooperation in all possible areas, including high technology, given Egypt’s experience with a “Smart Village”.

In addition to these proposals, Presidents Nazarbayev and Mubarak also discussed establishing an air link between Cairo and Astana or Almaty and organizing cultural Days of Egypt in Kazakhstan in 2008. President Mubarak reportedly accepted all of the Kazakh leader’s proposals and instructed his ministers to work toward making them a reality.

On the political side, President Nazarbayev expressed full support for President Mubarak’s peacemaking efforts and invited Egypt to become more actively involved in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) of which it is a member. Following the visit, a bilateral agreement on cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organized crime was signed, as well as an agreement on cooperation in education and research.

While in Cairo, President Nazarbayev also met with Secretary General of the League of Arab States Amre Moussa. Kazakhstan and the LAS signed a memorandum of understanding with President Nazarbayev saying, “It is necessary to strengthen relations with this organization and ensure peace and stability in all Arab and Muslim states.” The Kazakh President also announced he plans to visit Libya and Syria this year for the first time.

Following the visit, Kazakhstan and Egypt also agreed to jointly finance the restoration of the Sultan Baybars Mosque in Cairo, a strong sign of growing cultural ties. In another sign, the Kazakh leader also met the Imam of the world’s largest Muslim Al-Azhar University Sheikh Sayid Tantawy who is an active participant in the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions held in Kazakhstan every three years.

President Nazarbayev arrived in Cairo from Qatar, where he visited on Saturday to discuss political, trade and investment issues with Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. This year Kazakhstan opened its embassy in Qatar in a further sign of expanding ties with the region.

## **Wawaweewa! Tourism’s Alive in Kazakhstan**

Following is a story by Tracy Miller, Online Editor of the New York Daily News, posted on Friday, March 9, 2007. (Its permanent address is [here](#).) [Photo Gallery: The Real Kazakhstan](#)



**Borat, a.k.a. British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, has spiked tourism interest in his “home” country.**

When Borat promised to “make benefit” his home country of Kazakhstan, he wasn’t kidding.

Just months after Sacha Baron Cohen’s farcical film “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan” was released, the Central Asian nation is priming for a very real influx of tourists - and tourism dollars - from the U.S. and elsewhere.

“We are definitely seeing an increase in tourism-related calls,” said Roman Vassilenko, spokesman for the Kazakh embassy to the United States in Washington, D.C. “Before we were getting very few per week or none at all. Now we are getting around ten calls a day.”

The Oscar-nominated mockumentary that so many Kazakh officials feared would render their nation ridiculous may actually be having the opposite effect on curious travelers. Kazakhstan recently topped a poll commissioned by the British website TravellersConnected.com as the “number one must-see destination for 2007.”

Kazakhstan’s long-dormant tourism industry is prepared to capitalize on the country’s newfound infamy.

Even before “Borat” the movie hit wide release last November, Kazakh travel company Sayat announced two new, unabashedly Borat-themed travel packages in late October 2006.

The tours, called “Kazakhstan vs. Boratistan” and “Jagshemash!!! See the Real Kazakhstan” are weeklong affairs centered around Almaty, a former capital city of two million people that remains the nation’s cultural epicenter.

“We are hoping many Americans will want to engage in ‘cultural learnings’ of that unknown ‘glorious nation’ for their own ‘make benefit,’” Sayat’s executive director, Marianna Tolekenova, said in a press release.

Stops on the tours range from modern attractions like the Chimbulak ski resort to ancient historical sites like the 14th century Khodjha Akhmed Yassaui mausoleum, a renowned Muslim shrine in the city of Turkestan.

There’s also a scheduled overnight in a Kazakh yurt, where the bravest visitors might take a sip of *kumyss* - a traditional drink made from fermented horse milk.

Though Kazakhstan’s tourist facilities are “not highly developed,” according to a U.S. State Department consular advisory sheet updated Feb. 7, 2007, populous cities like Almaty and Astana are characterized as being generally safe for travelers.

“It’s as safe [in those cities] as it is to walk downtown in Washington, D.C., or New York,” said Vassilenko. Still, he recommended traveling with a tour group in order for Americans - who likely aren’t fluent in the local language - to get the most out of a visit.

More comfortable amenities may not be far behind. International luxury hotel chain Radisson recently opened a sparkling new 181-room hotel and conference center in Astana, the capital city.

As the man himself would say: “Is niice!”

For more information on “Borat”-themed tours, visit [www.sayat-travel.kz](http://www.sayat-travel.kz).

## Things to Watch:

- Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin will visit Moscow on March 19 for discussions with his Russian counterparts of ways to develop both bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the framework of integration associations in the Commonwealth of Independent States. A plan of actions for developing cooperation between the two foreign ministries is slated to be signed after the visit.
- Prime Minister Karim Massimov of Kazakhstan is expected to visit Azerbaijan in the near future for talks on promoting closer economic ties between the two countries. Both are littoral countries of the Caspian Sea, and energy and other exports from Kazakhstan through Azerbaijan have been growing in recent years.
- EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel visited Kazakhstan March 12 and 13 in preparation for the March 28 session of EU Troika - Central Asia meeting in Astana.
- We still have a few copies available of *Kazakhstan: Reaching for the Future*, a 9-minute video documentary prepared by our Embassy. It tells the story of what Kazakhstan has become in the 15 years of its independence and of the importance of strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the U.S. The video is available at Youtube [here](#). Those in the United States and Canada who would like to receive a copy on DVD, please contact Roman Vassilenko at numbers below.

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