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Say it in Kazakh:

*Going on vacation:
Where are you going for
vacation? --- Demaluga
qaida barasyz?
We like... --- Biz ...
onatamyz.
mountains --- taugha
shykkandy
fishing --- balyk
aulugandy
hunting --- an
auluagandy
beaches --- suga
sholygandy
historical sites --- tarikhi
zherlerge bargan*

General Says Kazakhstan Will Keep Iraq Commitment

Lt. Gen. Bulat Sembinov, Kazakhstan's Deputy Defense Minister during a Washington visit this week said Kazakhstan will keep its military commitment in Iraq where engineers of Kazakhstan's KAZBAT battalion have already destroyed millions of pieces of deadly ordnance.

In an interview with the Washington Times, published on May 19, the General said, "Just because some other countries may be pulling back does not change in any way our decision. Our troops will continue to carry out the mission we have assigned them." Kazakh army engineers, in Iraq since 2003, have already destroyed more than 4,000,000 pieces of ordnance, and are now training Iraqi troops in explosive ordnance disposal.

The General was in Washington for consultations with Pentagon officials on a five year program of military to military cooperation initiated in 2003.

Under the program, the United States has helped Kazakhstan develop KAZBAT into a NATO compatible full strength peacekeeping battalion which will soon grow to brigade strength; has provided assistance in creating a Defense Institute of Foreign Languages, now transformed into a Regional Center of Language Training for the military of Central Asian countries, and provided support for Kazakhstan's modernization of its military.

**Lt. Gen. Bulat
Sembinov
arranges
ribbons on a
wreath he laid
at the Tomb of
the Unknown
Soldier at the
Arlington
National
Cemetery on
May 18, 2006.**

**Photo by
Assylbek
Mendygaliyev**



The program includes supplying 40 Hummers and the creation of a technical support center for the vehicles, and the future congressionally approved supply of Huey 2 helicopters.

Another area of Kazakhstan-U.S. defense cooperation is personnel training. "While in 2001 we had only slightly more than 20 men trained in the U.S., today we have 220 undergoing such training," Lt. Gen. Sembinov said. Kazakh military are being trained at the National Defense University, West Point, and the Army Staff College, among others.

U.S. assistance also goes to training professional noncommissioned officers in Kazakhstan as the country transforms its military from a draft based to a professional volunteer force. Seventy percent of Kazakhstan's standing military are now volunteers.

"We value both American experience and support", Lt. Gen. Sembinov said.

In Washington, the General met with Gordon England, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Nicholas Burns, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and other officials. He also laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arlington National Cemetery on May 18.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Announces Trade and Investment Mission to Kazakhstan

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns has invited U.S. agribusiness firms to participate in a trade and investment mission to Astana and Almaty, Kazakhstan, July 23-28, 2006.

"I look forward to leading this trade and investment mission that will strengthen the relationship between the United States and Kazakhstan," said Johanns in his May 12 invitation. "Kazakhstan has the largest overall economy and the largest agricultural economy in Central Asia, producing and exporting more grain than any other country in the region. I greatly encourage agribusiness firms to take advantage of this mission to establish new markets for American farm products and advance opportunities for investment."

Johanns traveled to Kazakhstan earlier this year to lead the U.S. delegation at the inauguration of President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The goal of the mission is to promote trade and investment, particularly in agricultural commodities, food products, agricultural machinery, agricultural inputs, livestock genetics and food processing equipment. While in Kazakhstan, mission participants will meet with government and agribusiness officials and have the opportunity to form business partnerships with local entrepreneurs.

Kazakhstan's real GDP is expected to grow by more than eight percent in the 2006-2007 period. The country already boasts the largest economy in Central Asia. Kazakhstan's banking system is recognized as the best in Central Asia and Eastern Europe according to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, creating an attractive investment climate evidenced by the highest level of foreign direct investment in Central Asia.

Approximately 15 U.S. agribusinesses will be selected to participate in the mission. For more information, contact Darrell Upshaw with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service at (202) 690 1339 or e-mail Tabitha.Coley@fas.usda.gov.

Brownback Introduces Silk Road Strategy Act II, Focusing on Security, Energy, Economic Development and Human Rights

U.S. Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) has introduced wide ranging legislation, the Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006 (S. 2749). The legislation, introduced on May 4 seeks to provide solid legislative backing for the United States relationship with the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

The bill would "modify targeting of assistance in order to support the economic and political independence of the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus in recognition of political and

economic changes in these regions since enactment of the original legislation.”

The original legislation, the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999, also sponsored by Senator Brownback, was adopted before the events of September 11, 2001, and the ensuing geopolitical shifts in the region.

The new bill says, “The United States has significant long-term interests in the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. These interests concern security, economic development, energy, and human rights. Accordingly, it is the policy of the United States to seek political and economic stability in the social development of, and cooperative relationships with, the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, including by providing assistance in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.”

The bill states that it is the policy of the United States:

- to promote independent, democratic government and the protection of human rights, tolerance, and pluralism in Central Asia and the South Caucasus;
- to aid in the resolution of ethnic, religious, interstate, and intraregional conflicts and to support political, economic, and security cooperation in that region;
- to reduce poverty in Central Asia and the South Caucasus through economic growth, promoting sustainable development through private investment in all economic sectors, including agriculture, education, private sector development, and capacity building;
- to aid in the development of infrastructure in Central Asia and the South Caucasus for energy and energy transit, communications, transportation, and health and human services;
- and to assist the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus in developing indigenous defense capabilities, securing borders, and implementing effective controls to prevent the proliferation of materials related to weapons of mass destruction and trafficking in conventional weapons, persons, and narcotics.

In its findings section, the bill notes the importance of relations with Kazakhstan for the U.S.: “In recognition of security cooperation from the Government of Kazakhstan, including deployment of the Kazakhstan contingent in Iraq, progress toward a market economy, United States business participation in energy and infrastructure development in Kazakhstan, and an ongoing Government of Kazakhstan policy of ethnic and religious tolerance, a relationship with Kazakhstan is of high importance to the United States.”

The bill also deals with efforts for greater democracy in the region and the recent wave of colored revolutions there, expressing the view that evolutionary change for the better is preferable to upheavals: “The 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate the essentialness of steady progress toward democracy and the rule of law. While these revolutions resulted in the ouster of corrupt and ineffective regimes by largely peaceful protest movements, the long term interests of security, stability, good governance, and economic growth are better served by evolutionary democratization.”

The bill provides specific policy recommendations to the U.S. Government on the best ways to achieve its goals in the region in the specified areas. Of particular note is the impetus on the promotion of an East-West corridor for transporting oil, gas and other goods from Kazakhstan westward, mechanisms to promote economic development in the region through the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), and efforts to integrate Afghanistan in regional developments.

“Support for countries in the region seeking accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), furnishing assistance to facilitate economic reform for countries in the region, and extension of unconditional and permanent nondiscriminatory treatment (permanent normal trade relations treatment) to countries in the region, especially to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan” are also called for in the bill.

If passed, the bill will also set up a “Silk Road Advisory Board” to include experts with necessary contacts and expertise in the region in sectors including sustainable agricultural development, oil and gas extraction, energy transportation infrastructure planning and construction, democratic development, banking, finance, and legal reform. It would also support a specialized private sector energy consultancy,

tasked with coordinating business community projects and promoting investment opportunities in trade as well as infrastructure for the production, transportation, and refining of energy.

The full version of the bill is available through the [Library of Congress](#) search engine.

GE and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy Begin Building Locomotive Plant near Astana

The Government of Kazakhstan and executives of General Electric (GE) Corporation announced the commencement of the construction of a locomotive plant near Astana when officials laid the first brick at the site on May 17.

Prime Minister Daniyal Akhmetov and US ambassador to Kazakhstan John Ordway participated in the ceremony at the site.

Yerlan Atamkulov, President of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy (KTZ), the national railway carrier, said “locomotives modernized with GE technologies are especially reliable and economical. They play a very important role in the conditions of the constant economic growth of Kazakhstan. When the operation of the GE Evolution series locomotives begins [after the launch of the plant], Kazakhstan Temir Zholy will be the trendsetter in the CIS in terms of railway technological standards.”

When the new plant reaches its full capacity, it will produce from 100 to 150 GE Evolution Series locomotives to be supplied for use all over the CIS. The production of locomotives is expected to begin in 2008.

GE and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy began cooperating in 1994. The two companies signed contracts in 2003 and 2004 providing for the supply of more than 250 GE-made engine kits for modernizing of KTZ-run locomotives. These kits include new engines, computer run systems and cooling systems, and they are assembled on previously repaired 2TE10 locomotives operated by KTZ.

The modernization of locomotives is part of a global GE initiative called “ecomagination”. The initiative calls for developing new technologies allowing GE customers to resolve the most challenging environment problems.

Kazakh Government Goes Online, Now at e.gov.kz

Askar Zhumagaliev, Chairman of Kazakhstan’s Agency on information technology development and communications, told the Majilis (lower house of Parliament) on May 15 that the e-Government web portal has been opened for a month, providing the most needed services for Kazakh citizens and foreign guests.

Zhumagaliev said the web site, at www.e.gov.kz, provides 377 services which are in the greatest demand. By the end of the year, this figure will be increased to 933.

The opening of the web site was called for in a state program on e-Government development up to the year 2007. The new initiative is part of the Government’s efforts to provide a more transparent and accessible system of services for citizens coupled with the reduction of conditions leading to corrupt activities. Zhumagaliev said the Agency will organize its own e-licensing program this year, and “will be issuing licenses and authorizations via the Internet without any face to face contact with those seeking such licenses. This will eliminate any bureaucratic barriers and remove any opportunities for corruption, he noted.

Based on its experience, Zhumagaliev said, the Agency “will then publicize its experience and all 18 licensing authorities on the government will start issuing their documents via the Internet in 2007.”

In addition to the web portal, Zhumagaliev’s agency has also been introducing electronic document exchange which already exists in five ministries. By the end of this year, all government bodies will have a protected system of electronic document exchange, helped by a recently passed law legalizing electronic signatures.

Zhumagaliev also told members of the Majilis that the Agency will work to reduce Internet rates to make the medium more accessible to users. Dial up is what most of the Internet users have in Kazakhstan. High costs of Internet services have been one of the key factors holding back the growth of Internet usage in the country. Rates are being slashed 25 percent as of June 1, 2006, and another 25 percent on September 1, 2006, he said. The goal is to reduce them to an annual average of 64 cents an hour for dial up in 2007.

Majilis Approves Bill Increasing Ombudsman's Authority

The Majilis approved legislation on May 17 broadening the mandate of the country's Human Right Ombudsman in another sign of growing democracy in Kazakhstan.

Bolat Baikadamov, the Ombudsman, told the Majilis deputies the bill, if passed, will expand his authority in seeking redress of human rights violations. In particular, the bill will give him the right to participate in court reviews of cases with a view to protecting rights of defendants, as well as authority to request the courts and prosecutors to review already existing court decisions, convictions and determinations.

Majilis deputies reviewed the bill in two hearings and sent it to the Senate for consideration.

Currently, the Ombudsman operates under the mandate of a 2002 presidential decree.

Things to Watch:

- Kazakhstan's ministries of foreign affairs and justice, and the OSCE mission in Kazakhstan are holding a conference in Astana on May 18-19, "Fighting Human Trafficking: Regional Response", focusing on ways to solve the problem in Central Asia.
- Kazakhstan's forex reserves reached US\$22.5 billion by May 16, including US\$8.6 billion in the National Fund. The National Bank announced the figures on May 17, saying the reserves grew 7.4 percent compared to the previous month.

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