



# Kazakhstan News Bulletin

Released weekly by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada  
[www.kazakhembus.com](http://www.kazakhembus.com)

November 10, 2006

Vol. 6, No. 40

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## **Mubarak, Nazarbayev Strengthen Ties, Discuss Revamping Middle East Peace Talks**

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak made his first official visit to Kazakhstan on November 11 to meet with President Nursultan Nazarbayev for the purposes of strengthening political, economic and cultural ties between the two nations.

Ministers from both nations signed contracts to encourage Egyptian investment in Kazakhstan's banking and transport industries, and to begin exports of wheat from Kazakhstan to Egypt. Kazakhstan produced more than 18 million tons of grain this year and is able to export up six to seven million tons to world markets. The two countries also signed agreements that let visitors from one country visit the other without visas. Mubarak was finishing a three-nation, nine-day tour which also included visits to China and Russia.

Beyond bilateral relations, one key subject on the agenda in Astana were efforts to re-start the Middle East peace process. Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan supports the "peace in exchange for territories" solution offered by Egypt earlier. He added, "Despite the distance between Kazakhstan and Egypt, we live in one and the same region. Peace in the Middle East may promote our trade and cooperation. Peace in the region would be beneficial to the entire world."

Kazakhstan, a moderate Muslim majority nation, has maintained good relations with both countries of the Arab world and Israel. It has promoted conflict resolution in Eurasia through numerous initiatives including the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures



**Kazakh designer Saida Azikhan (left) poses with one of the models showing off her winter collection in Washington, DC. See story on page 2.**

**Embassy photo**

in Asia (CICA) and the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Among the 18 member countries of CICA are countries and entities such as Egypt, Israel, Iran, and the Palestine Authority.

Nazarbayev described the Mubarak visit as “a historic event” and said he was looking forward to continued long term relations with the Egyptian leader. Mubarak invited Nazarbayev, who had previously visited Egypt in 1993, to visit his country again next year.

Mubarak also offered praise for Kazakhstan’s economic reforms. “Kazakhstan’s achievements, especially in the field of economics, have turned the country into one of the fastest growing economies in the world,” the Egyptian president said.

Trade between Kazakhstan and Egypt amounted to \$14.5 million dollars between January and August of 2006, the BBC reported.

Ties between Kazakhstan and Egypt are historical. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Egypt and Syria, as part of the Ottoman Empire, were ruled by Sultan Zaher Beibars, an ethnic Kazakh who made his way there as a mamluk, a mercenary warrior. At the end of the visit, Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan will sponsor the restoration of Sultan Beibars’s mosque in Cairo.

## **Forget ‘Borat’: Fashion Looks From the ’Stans**

*This story by Teresa Wiltz appeared in The Washington Post’s Style section on November 10, 2006.*

Borat had nothing to do with it. Truly, it was just a coincidence, the timing of last evening’s Central Asian fashion design show, featuring the latest couture from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the much-put-upon Republic of Kazakhstan. The embassy-sponsored event was *totally* unrelated to the box-office bonanza of that mustachioed faux Kazakh who mistook Romania for Kazakhstan and has been causing a bit of an image problem for the good people of Eurasia with Sacha Baron Cohen’s mockumentary, “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan.”

But if Borat’s big-screen antics drew a few looky-loos to the Meridian International Center last night, then sure, why not? If they came looking for woman-driven ox carts rumbling down the catwalk or to be served glasses of fermented horse urine, however, they’d be bound to leave dissatisfied. This was a fashion show conducted in earnest, featuring the luxe stylings of Saida Azhikhan of Kazakhstan, Baktybek Tulparov of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan’s Lola Babayeva, a show intended to showcase, and to show off.

Still, Borat was by no means ignored. Central Asian Cultural Exchange President David Carlson said at the start of the show, “I’d like to give a little thanks to Borat for giving us some publicity.”

“If you’re expecting any ugly women from Central Asia, you will be disappointed.”

Which is to say, of course, the models -- Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Mongols and a sprinkling of Americans -- were lovely to the eye, resembling not a whit Borat’s late-and-unlamented behemoth of a wife (or her American replacement). And the clothes. . .

This was a night that truly did make benefit the non-Borat-acious nation of Kazakhstan. And the other ’Stans. A night to “promote international understanding through fashion.”

To look at the mink-trimmed cocktail shifts, the tall, tubular hats and the chinchilla-trimmed jacket paired with au courant skinny jeans was to take a peek into the sartorial sensibilities of little-known nations halfway ’round the globe, nations once tied up with the fate of the Soviet Union and eager to reassert individual identities.

Designer Azhikhan, her blond hair providing striking contrast to her Central Asian features, seemed eager to present an alternative view of the Kazakh woman.

Did she see the movie? “Yes,” she said, shaking her head and smiling. “I saw.”

And did she laugh? “Yes. Very funny. But some situations . . . I felt a little bit sad.”

“Everything, it’s not true. . . . The faces are not exactly Asian faces. . . . We’re beautiful women in Kazakhstan. We like expensive clothes. We have high buildings! We have Bentleys! I have a home that cost \$3 million.”

Judging by Azhikhan's designs, Kazakhstan is a land where the women are rich, modest -- this is, after all, a largely Muslim nation -- and shivering from the cold. Think Doctor Zhivago transplanted into the cellphone excesses of the 21st century: rich jewel shades, earthy prints and pelts. Fur -- chinchilla, mink and faux -- cropped up in everything, trimming funnel necks on great, charcoal velvet coats, slung around the hips of a paisley-esque maxi-skirt, punctuating jackets shot through with shimmers of Swarovski crystals. (About the fur: It's a tossup as to who would be more unwelcome here: Sacha Baron Cohen or the red-paint slingers of PETA.)

Kyrgyzstan's Tulparov seemed preoccupied with then and now, serving up clothes that skittered between references to Kyrgyz children's clothing from the 18th and 19th centuries (lots of angelic smock dresses) and 21st-century club gear (lots of metallic thigh-grazing minis).

Designer Babayeva presented a view of the Uzbek woman as one who knows her place: rooted in tradition, wearing turbans and long, printed tunics and blazers trimmed with embroidery and gorgeous metal-plate necklaces. Then again, she seemed, too, to be paying homage to MC Hammer from back in his glory days, what with her preponderance of genie pants tricked out with floor-grazing crotches. Not a good look. In any language.

## **Kazakhstan Becomes Central Asia's First United Nations' ECOSOC Member**

Kazakhstan became one of 18 new members of the United Nations' Economic and Social Council elected last week. The republic will become the first Central Asian nation to hold the position, which will last from 2007 to 2009.

Kazakhstan received support from 187 out of 192 U.N. member nations, easily exceeding the minimum threshold of two thirds of total votes. The vote was recognition of Kazakhstan's strong economic performance over the past several years and projected growth during the next few years.

"We are certain the Central Asian region, with its huge territory and population of more than 50 million, should have its representative in this very influential body," said Yerzhan Kazykhanov, Kazakhstan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

The ECOSOC is United Nation's principal organ for discussing and coordinating international economic and social issues. The Council has 54 members, who are elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three year terms. Council seats are allotted based on geographical representation.

Kazykhanov said Kazakhstan would use its membership to draw attention to the difficult social, economic and ecological problems Central Asian countries are facing. These problems include the sale and use of illegal drugs, rising poverty rates of some countries of the region, and the continued desertification of the Aral Sea, Kazykhanov said.

In addition to Kazakhstan, Algeria, Barbados, Belarus, Bolivia, Cape Verde, Canada, Indonesia, Iraq, Luxembourg, Malawi, the Netherlands, the Philippines, El Salvador, Somalia, Sudan, Romania, and the United States were also elected.

## **Inaccurate 'Borat' Puts Kazakhstan on Map**

*This story by Jane Clark appeared in USA TODAY's Travel section on November 10, 2006.*

In the week since the release of Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit of Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan, Roman Vassilenko has been fielding a dozen or so tourism-related calls a day at his office at the Kazakhstan Embassy in Washington.

Which is a dozen or so more than he usually gets.

The embassy spokesman also continues to respond to questions from journalists in this way:

No, there is no annual "Running of the Jews" in Kazakhstan.

No, it is not possible to buy a Kazakh wife for 15 gallons of pesticide.

No, fermented horse urine is not a popular Kazakh refreshment.

“The only fact of the movie is the geographical location,” Vassilenko repeats for the umpteenth time.

He’s referring, of course, to last weekend’s No. 1 box-office hit. The movie stars British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen in the persona of Borat, a sexist, racist and all-around clueless broadcaster from Kazakhstan who bumbles his way through America, documentary crew in tow.

But Kazakh officials, who have found little to laugh at in Cohen’s depiction of one of their own, might be lightening up. After all, there’s no such thing as bad publicity, and this latest flurry is bound to result in a few more Americans differentiating Kazakhstan from all those other Central Asia “-stans” that once were part of the Soviet Union.

For his part, Vassilenko sees this newfound attention as neither PR windfall nor PR nightmare. He acknowledges, “It’s a blessing in disguise, but you have to work hard to remove the disguise.”

He estimates only 15,000 or so Americans annually venture to Kazakhstan and most of those are business travelers, plus some adoptive parents.

Undeterred by those relatively lean numbers, Sayat Tour, which describes itself as “a leading Kazakh tour operator,” has launched Kazakhstan vs. Boratistan tours that, tongue in cheek, promise to help Americans “engage in cultural learnings of that unknown glorious nation for their own make benefit.”

Meanwhile, Kazakh cultural doings in this country are taking on a higher profile. A fashion show Thursday in Washington spotlighting Kazakh designers was to have attracted several major media outlets, Vassilenko says. And an exhibit of ancient Kazakh ornaments, now on display at the Mingei International Museum in San Diego, will expand to other U.S. venues.

## **Things to Watch:**

- Kazakhstan will take on Portugal in Coimbra, Portugal, on November 15 as teams continue their qualifying rounds for the 2008 European soccer championship.
- Kazakhstan will celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence on December 16.

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