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Say It in Kazakh:

Where is the closest polling station? --- En zhakykyn sailau bolemshesi kai zherde ornalskan?

Can foreigners watch the voting? --- Shekel azamattary sailau barasyn bakylau zhasay alady ma? Yes/No – Ye/Zhok

Are you excited about the election? --- Sailau barasyna rizasyz ba? Did you vote? --- Siz dauis berdinizbe?

First Exit Polls Set for December 4, Researches Seek Data

Exit polls, a staple of Western elections, will be conducted in Kazakhstan on December 4th as part of the presidential election process for the first time.

A number of organizations and polling companies have already announced their plans to conduct exit polls including the Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists (ASPS) and the Kazakhstan Institute of Social and Economic Information and Prognosis (KISEIP).

The ASPS has said their pollsters will be working from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm on Election Day, throughout the duration of the voting. It is hoping for “sincere answers of voters as an invaluable help to sociologists in conducting an independent parallel vote count.” The Association has explained the polling is anonymous and its results will be presented in a generalized manner after the voting closes.

The KISEIP will conduct exit polls at 400 polling stations in eight of the country’s fourteen oblasts (administrative regions) and the cities of Astana and Almaty. The Institute is expecting to gather data from approximately 16,000 people.

Major Media Cover Nazarbayev, Tuyakbai, Baimenov

Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Culture, Information and Sport has been monitoring coverage in major state owned and controlled news media throughout the campaign and has observed that some candidates get more coverage than others.

According to the Ministry, from October 25 through November 27, the incumbent President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, received the most coverage with 344 news reports. He is followed closely by Zharmakhan Tuyakbai of *For a Fair Kazakhstan* movement with 330 news reports. Alikhan Baimenov, Chairman of the Ak Zhol Democratic Party, was the subject of 283 news reports, while Yerassyl Abylkasymov’s tally was 194 and Mels Eleusizov’s was 174.

Experts have explained differences in coverage by the



As predominantly Muslim Kazakhstan goes to the polls for the presidential election, a woman poll worker shows a man how to use the Sailau e-voting system in Astana.

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different level of activity of each candidate and their appeal to the media.

The monitoring included Kazakhstan and Khabar TV, Kazakh Radio, Yegemen Kazakstan and Kazakhstanskaya Pravda newspapers, and the national news agency Kazinform. It does not include the more than 2,000 other private news media outlets. The Ministry is due to issue its final election campaign coverage report on December 3, one day before the election.

Election Officials Put Final Touches On Ahead of Vote

As Election Day draws closer, officials of the almost 10,000 election commissions at all levels are putting final touches in preparation for the big event.

Up until this day they had to do huge amount of work in setting up polling stations, updating voter lists and educating voters, explaining the voting procedures with the use of the Sailau electronic system, and other details.

Overall, there are 9,803 election commissions in Kazakhstan including 9,583 constituency commissions, 167 district commissions, 37 city commissions and 16 regional commissions serving 14 regions and the cities of Astana and Almaty.

Because of changes introduced in April 2005 setting a limit of no more than 3,000 voters at each polling station, redistricting took place earlier this year leading to the creation of 200 new constituencies.

Following that, election commissions were established through elections by local assemblies (maslikhats). A total of 56,814 people were elected to commissions at all levels from 11 registered political parties, representing 82.8 percent of commission membership. Another 2,517 members (3.7 percent) were elected from public associations, and 9,253 members (13.5 percent) were selected at the recommendation of higher commissions.

In preparation for the vote, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has printed 8,722,955 voting bulletins and distributed them to polling stations.

The updated voter lists became available for public verification on November 13, which led to more than 111,000 changes and amendments, according to officials of the CEC.

The CEC has made wide ranging efforts to ensure transparency for the election, and especially of the vote count and tabulation. The CEC has obligated all constituency commissions to display vote tabulation results immediately as they are completed at all polling stations where they will remain posted for two days. Those 1,447 polling stations which have optional electronic voting will have to display three different types of results, including results from the e-voting, voting with regular paper ballots and unified election results.

Another of the CEC's important obligations in ensuring transparency of the election was the accreditation of foreign observers. As of November 28, the last day of observer registration, a total of 1,136 international observers were registered. This includes 465 observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, more specifically, its Bureau for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR/OSCE), 422 observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States. Twenty-seven countries will send 159 observers directly, while seven international organizations will bring 90 more observers.

The upcoming election in Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest country and with the most developed economy, is drawing much attention from foreign news media. The CEC has so far accredited 229 reporters from 25 countries for short term election coverage and 160 more for long term coverage.

Kazakhstan Will Repay \$849,000,000 in Loans Ahead of Schedule

Kazakhstan's Finance Minister Arman Dunayev said his country is set to pay US\$849 million in sovereign loans way ahead of schedule.

Dunayev said: "Given today's trends on the international foreign exchange market, and in order to

sterilize surplus money supply, the Finance Ministry has decided to repay, ahead of schedule, the sovereign loans which cost the most to service. This year early repayments will be US\$849 million.”

He said this would save Kazakhstan US\$290 million in future interest payments. “According to preliminary forecasts, the entire sovereign debt, both domestic and external, will be approximately US\$3.9 billion at the end of the year, or 7.8 per cent of forecast GDP,” he noted.

“The ratio of sovereign debt to GDP has fallen consistently in recent years,” Dunayev added. This has fallen from 26.5 per cent in 2000 to around 8.8 per cent of forecast GDP by November 1 of this year.

Spending totaled 892 billion tenge, up 20.3 per cent, with budget loans at 49.479 billion tenge, and the acquisition of financial assets at 87.4 billion tenge. According to the ministry, 89.6 per cent of budget revenue came from taxes, 3.1 per cent from non-tax revenue, and 7 per cent from transfers. Most spending went to the social sector with 37.4 per cent, and 21.8 per cent went to state services and defense. The 2005 budget was approved with revenue of 1.243 trillion tenge, or 18.9 per cent of GDP, spending of 1.359 trillion tenge, or 20.7 per cent of GDP and a deficit of 113.8 billion tenge, or 1.7 per cent of GDP.

However, by the end of September 2005 Kazakhstan has recorded a budget surplus of 111.819 billion tenge (US\$833.9 million), or 9.8 per cent of revenue. Budget revenue was 1.14 trillion tenge and spending was 1.03 trillion tenge over the same period.

Kazakhstan Could Need 60 to 70 New Passenger Planes by 2015

Prime Minister Danial Akhmetov said on November 24 Kazakhstan may need 60 to 70 new passenger airliners by 2015 given the growing volume of air traffic.

As he commented on a draft program for civil aviation development, Akhmetov said new planes will be needed “to ensure flight safety and air security.”

Under the program, airports in Kazakhstan will also need to be modernized.

Passenger traffic on commercial planes in Kazakhstan is forecast to grow from 2.2 million in 2005 to 11.7 million in 2015.

Kazakhstan’s commercial air fleet of about 30 airplanes, including 12 planes of Western manufacture, are currently operating regular domestic passenger routes and also flying to destinations in Europe and Asia. Airlines in Kazakhstan also have about 120 other passenger planes, mostly old An-24 and Yak-40 models.

With its location in the heart of Eurasia, Kazakhstan seeks to become a major air transit hub for the continent. The country consistently draws the attention of air carriers. For example, FEDEX has been operating a trans-Eurasian cargo flight from Hong Kong to Paris via Almaty since October 2003, and other options are being examined.

Astana Set to Enjoy Winter with New Ice City and Skating Canal

As Astana prepares for winter, the city administrators are busy making sure the people of the capital have enough heat and that the roads will stay clean during the winter snows. They are also making sure the city’s half million residents will have a chance to enjoy the brighter side of winter. For that, officials have commissioned an Ice City, which has been the feature of Astana’s winters since the late 1990s, and adding, for the first time, an 800 meter (2,600 feet) skating canal complete with more ice sculptures and hockey rinks.

The Ice City will be located next to the Duman entertainment center which features a salt water aquarium which is the farthest from any ocean in the world. The Ice City will boast frozen replicas of well known landmarks of the world such as the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Eiffel Tower from Paris, Big Ben from London, and the Baiterek tower from Astana. The sculptures will be displayed in accordance with the locations of the originals.

Astana, which shares the top three spots as the world’s coldest capital with Ottawa in Canada and

Ulan Bataar in Mongolia, has been Kazakhstan's capital since December 1997. Building an ice skating canal, Astana is following in the footsteps of Ottawa whose Rideau Canal Skateway has been turned into a magical 7.8-kilometer roadway of ice in the very heart of Canada's capital for 35 years, and a major tourist attraction.

Things to Watch:

- The December 4th presidential election. The Central Election Commission is expected to announce the results of the election on December 5. On that day, observation missions from OSCE/ODIHR and other international organizations will also present their preliminary reports on the election campaign and the voting itself.
- The President of Kazakhstan signed on November 22 a law for the 2006 national budget which sees a steady increase in spending for social security, education and healthcare purposes. The budget calls for revenues of 1,468,225,079,000 tenge (US\$1=134 tenge), and expenditures of 1,476,210,603,000 tenge, leaving a budget deficit of 113 billion tenge, or 1.4 percent of GDP.

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