



A bi-weekly online publication of the  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Republic of Kazakhstan  
[www.mfa.kz](http://www.mfa.kz)  
Issue # 45  
Friday, 19 March 2010



## **Astana, Tashkent Strengthen Ties, Seek Joint Solutions to Regional Issues** (Nazarbayev's visit to Uzbekistan defined as successful, substantive)

## **OSCE Launches Photo Contest on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination** (Contest sponsored by Kazakh Chairmanship to draw attention to its priorities)

## **Kazakh Envoy Visits Sarajevo, Podgorica, Says OSCE Supports Reforms** (Zhigalov rounds up tour of South Europe with meetings in BiH, Montenegro)

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## **Kazakhstan Gears Up for Five-Day Nauryz Celebration** (One of the most favourite holidays marks spring renewal)

## **Astana, Tashkent Strengthen Ties, Seek Joint Solutions to Regional Issues**



The two presidents agreed to strengthen cooperation on bilateral and regional issues.

Photo by Sergey Bondarenko, Bolatbek Otarbayev

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan paid an official visit to Uzbekistan on March 16 and 17 for talks with his counterpart President Islam Karimov which focused on strengthening bilateral political and economic ties between the two neighbouring states.

At a joint press conference in Tashkent on March 17, the presidents of the two largest countries in Central Asia presented a common position as they addressed problems facing the region, including proper management of water resources and the stabilization of Afghanistan.

One of the most important agreements reached during the two day visit related to water management.

The two presidents announced there should be international expertise conducted first before the construction new dams or hydro-electric power stations on Central Asia's main rivers, including Syr Dariya and Amu Dariya.

"Until we have the result of the expertise, we shouldn't build them," Nazarbayev said, explaining that he had spoken earlier with the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to review and coordinate this approach. This issue relates to a possible construction of the Roghun hydropower station in Tajikistan and the Kambaratinskaya power station in Kyrgyzstan.

President Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan would be also very interested in participating in consortia implementing these projects as they clearly have a regional impact.

One of the main political outcomes of the visit was President Karimov's support of the OSCE summit this year in Astana with a focus on Afghanistan, a reflection of the growing recognition regionally that the OSCE can indeed play a more critical role in stabilizing that country.

“We are grateful to Uzbekistan and personally to Islam Karimov for the support to our chairmanship of the OSCE, as well as of our idea for an OSCE summit this year. I think it should be used as a good platform where the problems of stabilizing Afghanistan could become a main topic,” President Nazarbayev stressed in Tashkent.

During the visit, the two presidents issued a joint statement. Officials also signed an intergovernmental agreement on mutual provision of land for construction of buildings of diplomatic missions, a program of cooperation between the foreign ministries for 2010-2011, a program of cooperation between the Ministry of culture of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of culture and sports of Uzbekistan in the field of culture for 2010-2012.

President Nazarbayev noted trade between countries should be expanded.

“After the visit of Islam Karimov to Kazakhstan in 2007 the volume of trade tripled and reached almost 1.8 billion dollars. And this is not the limit,” President Nazarbayev said.

That was the figures for 2008. Last year, due to global economic crisis it decreased to 1.2 billion dollar.

“Kazakhstan has a 5 billion dollar trade turnover with Switzerland. Where is Kazakhstan and where is Switzerland or Norway? And here, nearby, we have no trade,” the Kazakh leader noted.

“We have jointly commissioned our governments to draw up a list of all the goods that Kazakhstan can buy from Uzbekistan, without resorting to other countries, and what Uzbekistan can get in Kazakhstan, the parties should reach this agreement and begin implementing it. I am sure, we can raise our trade seriously,” the Kazakh President said.

Kazakhstan’s export to Uzbekistan in 2009 reached 800 million dollars and imports totaled 400 million dollars. According to bilateral agreements, exports and imports of goods between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is relieved of duty, with alcohol, beer, rice and tobacco treated differently.

The understandings reached in Tashkent this week have opened the way for a closer interaction between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan which would be beneficial for both regional security and development in Central Asia.

“There are no disagreements between our countries which our ‘friends’ have tried to find, no clashes, rivalry for leadership, these are all inventions. There have always been those who didn’t want us to be friends. We have enough will, political understanding to not allow this,” President Nazarbayev said in conclusion.

His feelings were reciprocated by his host, Islam Karimov, who noted: “We watch carefully what is going on in your country, and proceed from one simple principle: Kazakhstan’s successes are Uzbekistan’s successes, just as Uzbekistan’s successes are, I hope, Kazakhstan’s successes. This is the principle we would like to build our relations, and I am sure this meets our mutual interests.”

## **OSCE Launches Photo Contest on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

The OSCE launched a photo contest on March 18, 2010, to highlight tolerance and non-discrimination - key priorities of the OSCE Chairmanship of Kazakhstan in 2010 - with winners receiving a trip to Astana in June.

Initiated and financed by the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the OSCE, the contest invites photographers, both professional and amateur, residing in the 56 OSCE participating States to submit photos illustrating the importance of tolerance and non-discrimination on racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious grounds.

A selection of photographs will be presented at a special exhibition at the OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-discrimination in the Kazakh capital, Astana, on 29 and 30 June, and showcased on the OSCE website. The prize for the five winners will be a trip to Astana to an award ceremony at the conference, and a tour of Astana's sights and surroundings.

The deadline for submissions of entries is 10 May 2010, 24:00 (midnight) Central European Time. Contest details can be found on the OSCE website: <http://www.osce.org/item/43109.html>

## Kazakh Envoy Visits Sarajevo, Podgorica, Says OSCE Supports Reforms

Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Konstantin Zhigalov, the Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, visited Sarajevo on March 17 saying the OSCE is committed to the security, stability and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and will continue to promote reforms.

"Reforms in the field of education, local governance, rule of law and security co-operation are crucial to the country's stability and progress. The OSCE, and particularly its Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, will continue its support in this field," Zhigalov said.

A successful constitutional reform would require a consensus-based dialogue that engages all political actors and respects the country's diversity, he added.

"An inclusive political discourse, both in the context of constitutional reform and in relation to the campaign for the general elections in October, would also be beneficial for the country's prospects," Zhigalov said.

Zhigalov's agenda for the visit included meetings with the Chairman of the BiH Presidency Haris Silajdzic, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ana Trisic-Babic and High Representative and European Union Special Representative Valentin Inzko.

Zhigalov also discussed the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship plans, highlighting an envisaged informal ministerial meeting set to take place this summer in Almaty.

"An informal meeting in Almaty would provide an excellent opportunity to discuss the Corfu Process, the Vienna Document 1999, the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan and the substance of an OSCE summit," he said.

Earlier on his visit to South Balkans, Zhigalov visited Podgorica where he welcomed Montenegro's determination to continue its pro-democratic reforms.

"We are encouraged by the progress in Montenegro's reform process. However, there are some important areas where further work is needed, including the fight against corruption and organized crime," he said as he met Deputy Prime Minister Svetozar Marovic, Foreign Minister Milan Rocen and Deputy Parliament Speaker Rifat Rastoder.



(clockwise from top left) The Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Konstantin Zhigalov meets the Chairman of the BiH Presidency, Haris Silajdzic, in Sarajevo on 17 March 2010, Montenegro's Foreign Minister Milan Rocen in Podgorica on 16 March 2010 and Albania's President Bamir Topi in Tirana on 16 March 2010.

Photo by OSCE/Wedran Pribilovic, OSCE/Savo Prelevic, OSCE/Armando Babani respectively

## Rebuilding Life after Disaster in Almaty Region



Search and rescue works continue in the region of Kyzylagash: the rescue team, involving more than 700 people with nearly 110 pieces of equipment, has built a tent village and a well-equipped field hospital near the village and continues to help people of Kyzylagash overcome the consequences of the disaster.

The Government and the people across Kazakhstan are coming together trying to restore life and help victims of the most serious flood in the country's recent history, which claimed the lives of 40 people and wiped out a village.

The Government decided to allocate 600 million tenge (KZT 150 = 1 USD) out of its emergency funds to eliminate the consequences of the calamity, which happened last week.

Rainfall and melting snow led on March 12 to the erosion of a dam, and dam reservoir near the village of Kyzyl-Agash in Almaty oblast split

open. According to latest figures, 37 people were killed in the ensuing flood in this village, with at least a few other neighbouring villages suffering heavy damage. The flood affected almost 4,000 people, of which 1,400 had to be evacuated. Because of the floods, movement of rail transport in the region was suspended, several highways have been closed.

This week, Prime Minister Karim Masimov of Kazakhstan, who visited the site of the disaster the next day, demanded to complete the reconstruction work in affected areas by autumn and to organize patrolling of all dams at all major reservoirs of the country during the flood seasons.

The 600 billion tenge is being spent in two targeted transfers. First, of about 500 million tenge, has been allocated for assistance to residents, as well as for priority activities for the rehabilitation of water and house repairs. The second one of 100 million tenge will go for the construction of new homes. Bereaved families will receive financial assistance amounting to 500,000 tenge each.

These days, people began returning to the Kyzyl-Agash village, and a lot of them have to live in a local school. The Department of Emergency Situations has set canteens in the school yard, brought coal, gas bottles, drinking water, and provided the survived animals with hay. They have also installed radio antenna for the telephone. In addition, the school and 120 houses were connected to electricity. Police patrols the village to prevent looting.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev ordered to check all private water reservoirs for compliance with safety standards and, in case of non-compliance, return them to state ownership.

The destroyed dam was privately owned. Criminal have been launched against local officials and private owners of the destroyed dam.

A governmental commission, together with the Akim (Governor) held on-site meeting in the village. It turns out that 686 houses, engineering facilities, transport infrastructure need to be reconstructed in the villages of Kyzyl-Agash, Egensu, Alashda and Aktogai. Traffic on the Kazakhstan - Ust-Kamenogorsk highway and the Saryozek – Ushtobe railway line is yet to resume.

Akim (Mayor) Akhmetzhan Yesimov of Almaty said his city would allocate financial assistance amounting to 100 million tenge. In addition, staff at the city administration (as well as in organizations throughout the country) has made the decision to transfer their one-day salary to the affected in the neighbouring region.

Yesimov also dismissed the threat of floods and mudflows in Almaty, located in the foothills of the snow-capped Tien Shan mountains. The Department of Emergency Situations is working around the city to monitor the situation and prevent possible avalanches, mudflows and floods.

NGOs in Almaty organized the collection of things needed for the victims, while student organizations in the country organized mass gathering of humanitarian aid for victims.

To collect the donations and channel them to the villagers, officials have opened an account at Kazakhstan's National Bank, where one can transfer money to help the victims.

In case anybody would want to contribute, here are the account details.

Bank account:

ИИК 002700125 kzt

БИК банка: 194101601

РНН 530200007643

Кбе 18

## **Kazakhstan Gears Up for Five-Day Nauryz Celebration**

Kazakhstan will celebrate Nauryz, a non-religious folk celebration of the vernal equinox and of the symbolic renewal of nature, on March 22.

This spring holiday of the renewal has been celebrated for more than five thousand years by many cultures of the Near East and Central Asia and, according to some sources, by eastern Slavs as well. Nowadays, it is one of the most favourite holidays in Kazakhstan.

Historical records referring to this holiday can be found in ancient and middle age documents.

The present day name of Nauryz derives from the Persian Nauryz, translated as a new day. The Tajiks call it Gulgardon or Gulnavruz, the Tatars refer to it as Nardugan, and the Ancient Greeks knew it as Patrich.

The Kazakhs also often refer to Nauryz as Ulystin uly kuni which means the great day of the nation. They say that the generous celebration of the Nauryz brings wealth and success in the coming year. This belief explains the splendour of the holiday-related rituals and customs.

On the territory of modern-day Kazakhstan, Nauryz had been celebrated in pre-Islamic times and later. In the past, it used to last from three to nine days. During the Soviet times, it became a symbolic New Year, with official calendar being kept as everywhere in the world. The Kazakhs passed the Nauryz traditions from generation to generation, and today it has acquired new spiritual and ethical meaning.

Nauryz has a remarkable endurance and survival capacity throughout the long and dramatic history of Kazakhstan. The totalitarian Soviet system did not recognize the existence of any national identity and any reference to

traditional heritage was considered to be anachronism.

Since 1926, throughout the Soviet period, it had been declared ideologically inconsistent and was “hushed-up”.

Nauryz was formally reinstated as a public holiday in 1988, and was officially recognized by a presidential decree in March 1991.

Nauryz has many unique features. The holiday’s central theme of renewal and joy hence gave birth to the tradition, on the eve of Nauryz, to thoroughly clean one’s house, return one’s debts, forgive all offences and resentments and make peace with all with whom you were at odds.

It is believed the Nauryz night brings luck and realization of wishes. Therefore, one has to greet it with clear soul and mind and fill all the vessels at home with milk, grain or spring water so that prosperity never leaves one’s household.

During the month of Nauryz (The Kazakh name for March), one has to help the land to clear its life-giving arteries, to clean natural and artificial water channels and chutes sprinkling them with hallowed milk thus wishing fertility to Motherland. Cultivation, planting and other agricultural work are to be started.

During the Nauryz, it is customary to share generously one’s dastarkhan (table filled with food). A special dish – Nauryz kozhe (a yogurt soup) – is prepared for the feast. In the past, a family in each yurt (nomadic tent house) would have their own recipe. The only rule for making it is the number of ingredients. It should have seven. The guests are served the best meat dishes such as qazy, qarta, shujiq (lamb and horse meat delicacies) among others.

Various kinds of competitions are included in the festival program, such as horse races and wrestling. The Aytis (a contest of two or more improvising folk poet-musicians) is a joyful competition of wit and poetic skill. There are also many songs, dances and games.

One of the bright traditions that was described in one of Abai’s manuscripts is the Nauryz - bata or Nauryz blessing. To receive a blessing on this day from the aqsaqals (elderly) and azhe (women of old age) is considered a big honour and sign of kindness.

Of course, the modern festival is different from the old. It is not only about staged shows, ornate yurts, and delicious Nauryz-kozhe. It is also about charitable events, folk sporting games, tending of plants, planting trees, cleaning of parks, streets and squares.

Nowadays, the ancient holiday of Nauryz has become a truly national holiday of spring, work and unity in the multi-ethnic Kazakhstan.

This year the people in Kazakhstan will have five days off for Nauryz, from March 20 through March 24. Under the current legislation, the Nauryz is officially celebrated three days from March 21 to 23, and since one of the celebration days falls on a Sunday, it is automatically compensated by the following work day.



Nowadays the Nauryz is a holiday equally enjoyed by all the peoples in the multi-ethnic Kazakhstan, as the ancient festival has harmoniously integrated into the modern life of the Kazakhs.

## Also in the News:

- Kazakhstan's State Agency for Financial Supervision issued a license to the first Islamic bank in Kazakhstan, Al-Hilal from UAE. Its activities will focus on providing a full range of banking services to the corporate sector: finance, operational services and consulting services. Retail services sector will be limited to operational service and deposit products for VIP-clients. Full range of retail banking products and services will be introduced later with the spread of the principles and practices of Islamic finance in Kazakhstan.
- President Viktor Yanukovich of Ukraine accepted an invitation from Nursultan Nazarbayev to visit Astana during a telephone conversation they had this week. He also invited Nazarbayev to visit Ukraine. The heads of state reaffirmed the mutual interest in developing political and trade-economic cooperation to a new stage.
- Secretary of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Kanat Saudabayev of Kazakhstan held a telephone conversation with the Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov of Russia on March 15. The diplomats discussed implementing the agreements reached by the two presidents, topical issues of bilateral partnership, exchanged views on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of CIS countries in Moscow on March 26 and discussed cooperation in international organizations, including the OSCE.
- Kanat Saudabayev also spoke on the phone with the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Konstantin Gryshchenko. The two sides reviewed the agenda for the upcoming visit of Saudabayev to Ukraine as the OSCE Chairman. It is expected that within this trip to Eastern Europe Saudabyaev will visit Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova.
- This week, Chairman of the Senate (upper house of Parliament) Kassym-Zhomart Tokaev met the Ambassador of Norway Malmer Dag Halvorsen as well as the Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation Stefan Nelly. Tokaev informed the diplomats about the Trans-Asian Parliamentary Forum "The Eurasian dimension of the OSCE" which will be held in May this year in Almaty, and invited the parliamentarians from Norway and Switzerland to take part in this event.
- Kazakhstan's Republican Guard, Ulan, has celebrated its 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary this week. Its servicemen provide round-the-clock protection for standards of the state, including the Emblem and the Flag of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the residence of the President, and a number of other important public facilities. Guardsmen also participate in staging honour guard ceremonies for visiting foreign leaders.
- Kazakhstan plans to increase copper production by 95,000 tons, or almost 25 percent, from 400,000 tons by 2015, Deputy Prime Minister Aset Isekeshiev reported. Kazzinc will account for 70,000 tons of the increase and Kazakhstan's biggest copper miner Kazakhmys will take up the rest, Isekeshiev explained.
- Swedish telecommunications holding company Tele2 completed the acquisition of a 51 percent stake in the Kazakhstan's mobile operator NEO for 76.8 million dollars. Tele2 will invest 50 million dollars in the increase of share capital of the mobile operator. It also receives an option for the remaining 49 percent stake, valid for five years.
- Kazakh-British Technical University has launched a computer cluster, the so-called supercomputer, allowing to carry out complex geophysical surveys for oil and gas industry. The supercomputer allows KBTU integrate with more than 70 research organizations in Europe and the United States and become part of the projects realized within the framework of Enabling Grids for E-Science (EGEE). It is expected that Kazakhstan will enter fifteen leading systems in the TOP-50 supercomputers in the CIS.
- The Ministry of Communication and Information of Kazakhstan lifted a ban on overseas hosting sites in the .kz domain. This recommendation was given to the authorities of Kazakhstan by the OSCE. Now users can create .kz websites without the server referencing to Kazakhstan. This simplifies the procedure of registration for web pages.
- Asia Auto, one of the largest auto plants in Central Asia, will start assembly of three Kia models in 2010, company's President Yerzhan Mandiev said. It will include the C class sedan Kia Cerato and two SUVs: Mohave and the 2010 version of Kia Sorento. Specialists from Asia Auto

are currently being trained at Kia's South Korean auto factories. Asia Auto also plans to start the assembly of new Skoda Yeti crossover and Cadillac SRX SUV.

- In recent years, Kazakhstan has seen the reduction in morbidity and mortality from tuberculosis, experts noticed at a conference dedicated to the World Tuberculosis Day on March 24. In the past year, 16 percent fewer new cases of tuberculosis and 26 percent fewer cases of mortality are registered in the country compared with 2008.

### **Things to Watch:**

- Kanat Saudabayev, Secretary of State – Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, will visit Japan from March 23 to 25, at the invitation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. During his stay in Tokyo, Kanat Saudabayev will meet H.E. Mr. Katsuya Okada, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan to exchange views on bilateral relations and on current international situations. He will meet other top level officials in the Government and the Parliament of Japan, and deliver remarks to representatives of Japanese business circles.
- A delegation of business people from of Belarus will visit Kazakhstan on March 29 - April 2 seeking to find business partners, promote Belarusian goods and establish various forms of mutually beneficial cooperation.
- Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, and the EU will discuss the forming of a single economic space on March 25. The conference will be the first meeting in a series of international conferences "Technical regulation 2012. Toolkit for Forming the Single Economic Space". Similar events are planned in Astana in April-May 2010 and in Minsk in June 2010.
- As Kazakhstan is entering a five day celebration of the Nauryz on March 20-24, the next *Astana Calling* edition will be out on March 26.

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ASTANA CALLING is a bi-weekly online publication of  
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
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