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President Opens Parliament Session

President Nursultan Nazarbayev began his address to Parliament on September 3 by summarizing the performance of the economy in the first six months of 2012, before setting out the key legislative tasks for this Parliamentary session. Kazakhstan continues to display resilience to the global economic and financial crises, achieving GDP growth of 5.6 per cent and increasing foreign currency reserves by almost 15 per cent to over 83 billion dollars in the first half of the year.

Despite strong key economic indicators, the President emphasized the importance of budgetary restraint in the current global climate. Spending has already been cut by 15 billion tenge (100 million dollars) in this year's budget and there may be opportunities for further savings. All expenditure must be focused on measures to support economic growth and employment, the President said.

The President tasked the Government with developing new legislation, as well as amendments to existing legislation, across three key areas to sustain economic growth:

- Firstly, a series of draft laws to ratify the commitments made by Kazakhstan under the country's forthcoming accession to the World Trade Organization;
- Secondly, legislation to bolster support for domestic producers, especially in the processing and agrarian sectors; here, the President instructed the Government to work with the SamrukKazyna Fund to analyze global practices and design a model of support for Kazakhstani producers;
- Thirdly, legislation aimed at implementing the principles of a Society of Universal Labor, initially in the areas of social job creation and occupational qualifications.

Finally, the President urged the Government to show initiative in drafting legislation which is both fit for purpose and socially inclusive. As well as addressing issues clearly and comprehensively and regulating social relations effectively, the new laws should work towards the central purpose of improving the quality of life of every citizen of Kazakhstan, he said.



President Nazarbayev opened the second session of the fifth Parliament of Kazakhstan on September 3.

“State spending on education has increased 1.5 times over the last two years and is steadily approaching that of developed countries, which typically ranges between 6-8% of GDP.”

Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan

This is the second session of the fifth Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Parliament is the bicameral legislature established by the 1995 Constitution. The Senate, or upper house, comprises 47 deputies, of whom 32 are elected by the oblasts and main cities (Almaty, Astana), while the remaining 15 are appointed by the President to ensure that all national and cultural interests are represented. The lower house, the Majilis (“Assembly” in Kazakh), consists of 107 deputies: 98 are elected from political party lists in a secret ballot on the basis of universal suffrage, while a further nine, representing Kazakhstan's various ethnic groups, are elected by the Assembly of the People.

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Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan

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President Meets Students of Nazarbayev University

Interactive lectures entered the national curriculum this week, with an address by President Nursultan Nazarbayev to the students of Nazarbayev University on the topic: “Kazakhstan on the path to a knowledge society.” The lecture was the first live broadcast of the new TV channel Bilim (Knowledge), officially launched by the President just before his address. The President outlined how specific measures are being taken to maximize Kazakhstan’s intellectual potential. First and foremost, the State Program of Education Development to 2020 aims to modernize the education system and bring it into line with the highest international standards.

President Nazarbayev emphasized that the modernization of the education system is closely tied to Kazakhstan’s economic goals. In the transition to a knowledge-based economy, knowledge is a key economic resource of the country. “The new economy and life of the 21st century are based on knowledge and on science,” said the President; “these are the means to preserve and develop the pace of economic growth.”

The Head of State assured the student audience that youth policy remains a priority for Kazakhstan.



September 5, 2012

State spending on education has increased 1.5 times over the last two years, to an annual level in excess of 1.3 trillion tenge (approx. \$8.7 million), or around 5% of GDP. The level of spending is steadily approaching that of developed countries, which typically ranges between 6-8% of GDP.

The President said that increased investment in education has already had a significant impact, for instance through centralized quality control, per capita financing, a new model of multilingual education and new channels of interaction between the education sector and employers.

With these measures, Kazakhstan has laid the foundation for an integrated and innovative education system from kindergarten to tertiary level. The pace of progress has been recognized by UNESCO, which has ranked Kazakhstan among the top four countries in its index of education development for the last four years running.

A central Committee on Youth Affairs has been established, along with regional youth affairs departments, and the President confirmed that a Concept on Youth Policy Development to 2020 is also underway.

The President called on students to make the most of the opportunity to continue their studies, and to build on the basic capital of their education by continuously learning and improving throughout their professional careers.

After the lecture, President Nazarbayev took questions from students from all regions of Kazakhstan and in foreign countries.

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Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan

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Uzbekistan President Visits Kazakhstan

On September 6-7 President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, visited Kazakhstan at the invitation of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Discussion between the two presidents covered political cooperation, stability and security in Central Asia, the strengthening of trade, economic, investment, cultural and humanitarian relations, as well as cross-border cooperation.

President Nazarbayev highlighted the importance of Uzbekistan as a strategic partner, and a friendly neighbor. “Kazakhstan is open and wants to enjoy the closest possible ties with your country. We have always been and will remain strong supporters of enlarging and deepening bilateral relations in all areas,” the President said.

“Today we have agreed to draw up an inventory of bilateral documents, and to see what works, remove those that do not, and add new ones that look ahead,” he added.

Over 100 bilateral agreements have been signed since the countries established diplomatic relations in 1992.

President Karimov paid tribute to the history of friendly relations between the peoples of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and their common heritage. “I am convinced that awareness of these roots and sound understanding of our peoples’ common interests have created a solid foundation for our bilateral relations to develop and strengthen despite the challenging times in which we live,” he said.

The two presidents also discussed regional security issues, in particular the situation after the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan.

They also welcomed the strong trade and economic relations between their countries, which they agreed would likely double over the next two or three years. In 2011, bilateral trade amounted to \$1.95 billion, 24 percent up on 2010. During the first six months of 2012 bilateral trade turnover is estimated at \$925 million.

“I fully agree with Nursultan Nazarbayev’s optimism, that within two or three years, we will be able to double the turnover. I think that by the end of this year it will exceed three billion dollars. However, this figure does not reflect the full extent of our capabilities,” Karimov said.

During the visit a number of bilateral agreements were signed.

President Karimov’s visit coincides with the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A number of events have been scheduled to mark this year’s anniversary, including a concert by Uzbek and Kazakhstani musicians, a celebration of Kazakhstani cinema to be held in Uzbekistan, and a conference bringing together experts from both countries to debate the results of 20 years of bilateral relations. A monument to the great Kazakh writer and philosopher Abay Kunanbayev will also be unveiled in Uzbekistan’s capital Tashkent as a tangible symbol of the strong ties between the two countries.



Nursultan Nazarbayev (R) and Islam Karimov in Astana, September 6

“I am convinced that awareness of these roots and sound understanding of our peoples’ common interests have created a solid foundation for our bilateral relations to develop and strengthen despite the challenging times in which we live ”

President Karimov

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Cardinal Sodano to Consecrate Karaganda Cathedral

The Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Fatima, in the Diocese of Karaganda, will be consecrated on September 9 by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Dean of the College of Cardinals of the Holy See.

During his visit this week to Kazakhstan, the papal envoy met with President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Chairman of the Senate and Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Kairat Mami.

Meeting with Cardinal Sodano, President Nazarbayev thanked the Holy See for its support to the World Congress of Traditional Religions, and for its active participation in the events. Cardinal Sodano greeted President Nazarbayev on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI, noting that the Vatican values Kazakhstan's contribution to interfaith dialogue, as well as its role in international security and the promotion of tolerance and understanding between cultures and religions.

The Catholic Church has a substantial presence in Kazakhstan with over 100 Catholic churches and chapels across the country.

“Cardinal Sodano greeted President Nazarbayev on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI, noting that the Vatican values Kazakhstan’s contribution to interfaith dialogue, as well as its role in international security and the promotion of tolerance and understanding between cultures and religions.”

The Cardinal also paid a visit to the Khazret Sultan mosque, Astana's largest and newest mosque, where he was accompanied by the Chairman of Kazakhstan's agency for religious issues, Kairat Lama Sharif.

In a pastoral letter in April, the bishops of Kazakhstan described the history of Karaganda's cathedral and the diocese, explaining that during the Soviet era, the city of Karaganda and the surrounding region, “earned for itself hideous notoriety as being a place of repression and banishment for anyone and everyone, of whatever nationality, ethnic group or religious denomination, who dared to challenge atheistic materialism.”

Karaganda was elevated to a diocese in 1999 and today has some 40,000 Catholics, served by over a dozen priests. Bishop Janusz Kaleta, a native of Poland, has charge of the diocese.

It is fitting that Cardinal Sodano should preside over the consecration of the cathedral since he laid its foundation stone in 2003 when he was Secretary of State of the Vatican.

Catholics form a small minority of the ethnically-diverse population of Kazakhstan, where the largest religious affiliations are Muslim (47%) and Russian Orthodox (44%).



Cardinal Sodano laid the foundation stone of the new Cathedral in 2003

Prime Minister of Estonia Visits Kazakhstan

Estonia's Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip, made a working visit to Kazakhstan September 5-8.

He met with President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Prime Minister Karim Massimov, Deputy Prime Minister Kairat Kelimbetov, and Transport and Communications Minister Askar Zhumagaliyev. Among the topics of discussion were various areas of cooperation, including transport and transit, energy, agriculture, education and public health.

President Nazarbayev noted that this year marks 20 years since Kazakhstan and Estonia established diplomatic relations, which have been going from strength to strength. Last year alone, the trade turnover between the two countries grew by 7%; 54 companies with Estonian participation are registered in Kazakhstan, mainly in import-export activities, intermediary services, furniture, food, construction and architecture.

The Estonian Prime Minister drew attention to the prospects for greater cooperation in different sectors of the economy. Estonian foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan amounted to USD 28.9 million in the first quarter of 2012.

The visit is expected to advance the implementation of the agreements reached during the state visit of President Nazarbayev to Estonia in April last year.

The Kazakhstan-Estonia business forum held in Astana during the visit brought together business representatives from both countries. Speaking at the opening ceremony, Prime Minister Massimov praised the quality of bilateral political and economic relations and stressed Kazakhstan's interest in attracting innovation. He invited Estonian companies to take part in implementing priority projects, particularly those related to the "green economy" in view of Estonia's experience of energy conservation and alternative energy sources.

Prime Minister Ansip said that Kazakhstan is Estonia's closest partner in Central Asia and that the high levels of mutual trust were the reason for blossoming commercial ties that have resulted in the doubling of bilateral trade in the last three years. He expressed optimism that trade levels would continue to grow in the coming years.

Prior to the prime minister's visit, on August 27-28, the Kazakhstan-Estonia Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation established in 2010 held its third meeting in Tallinn; the two sides discussed bilateral cooperation and reviewed promising projects related to trade, the economy and scientific innovation.



Andrus Ansip, Estonia's Prime Minister

“The trade turnover between the two countries grew by 7% in 2011; 54 companies with Estonian participation are registered in Kazakhstan, mainly in import-export activities, intermediary services, furniture, food, construction and architecture.”

Estonia's Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip



Over 55 companies attended the Kazakhstan-Estonia business forum in Astana on September 6, including 15 major Estonian companies.

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Substantial Pay Rises for Teachers

In the week that 2.5 million students began a new school year in Kazakhstan, it was announced that salary increases of up to 70% will be awarded to teachers completing a series of retraining courses. This latest measure in the far-reaching educational reforms now underway was confirmed by Deputy Prime Minister Yerbol Orynbayev, who said that over 120,000 teachers are to enter the retraining program over the next five years. Already, 3,000 teachers have completed the baseline training which secures them a 30% increase in salary. Those who go on to achieve second-level certificates will be awarded 70% pay rises, while teachers completing the advanced, first-level retraining will see their salary doubled.



Kazakhstan celebrates Knowledge Day on September 1.
Photo by Altaynews.kz

Retraining teachers is an essential foundation for successful education reform in Kazakhstan. The ten-year program, begun in 2011, aims to reshape the entire educational system to satisfy the demand for innovation in a knowledge-based economy. Kazakhstan's abundance of natural resources has resulted in an economy driven by raw material exports, but President Nazarbayev has set the goal of reducing this reliance by developing innovative industries. In a country where almost one-third of citizens are under 15 years of age, reform of the educational system in line with this goal will ensure a new generation with the skills and abilities to develop innovative industries in the coming decades.

“The ten-year program, begun in 2011, aims to reshape the entire educational system to satisfy the demand for innovation in a knowledge-based economy.”

The program takes a root-and-branch approach to reform, with every level of the educational system undergoing significant change. At university level, the introduction of corporate management techniques and multilingual education, together with the promotion of academic mobility, has set new benchmarks. Leading the way is Nazarbayev University (founded in 2010), where the best available international practices have been introduced and adapted to the curriculum and research in energy, life sciences and education policies has already reached a high level. Technical and professional education is also undergoing radical change, with a high level of involvement from employers in the development of training programs and new professional standards. In the school system, new structures, standards and teaching methods are will be introduced.

The Education Ministry has allocated additional financing of 118 billion tenge annually (nearly US \$800 million) to cover higher pay levels and by this year the average teacher's monthly salary will increase to 64,000 tenge (US \$428). The education reform program aims to raise average teachers' salaries to the same level as national average wages, with additional pay rises linked to training. As well as incentivizing teachers, the higher pay levels and improved training and qualification structures will also serve to improve the status of teachers in society and help attract the highest quality of young people into teacher training in the years to come.



“24 KZ” Broadcasting from Astana

Kazakhstan's national 24-hour HDTV news channel began broadcasting from Astana on the last day of summer. The arrival of “24 KZ” follows the completion of a national digital broadcasting network that was launched in July.

Broadcasting 24/7 in HDTV, 24 KZ provides news updates every 30 minutes, together with commentary and analysis from political and economic experts as well as politicians. 24 KZ and its sister website broadcast in both the Kazakh and Russian languages, with English programming also under consideration for the future.

Part of the Khabar Agency which operates regional news offices across Kazakhstan, 24 KZ is the first news channel to offer 100% domestic-produced programming, transmitted via national satellite television as well as cable-based networks. Editor-in-Chief, Arman Seytmamyt, pledged that 24 KZ will provide prompt, objective and impartial coverage of regional as well as global events, in keeping with its mission to become a truly national news channel.

“Broadcasting 24/7 in HDTV, 24 KZ provides news updates every 30 minutes, together with commentary and analysis from political and economic experts as well as politicians.”

The launch of 24 KZ, at the media center in Astana, was a major event attended by thousands of politicians, public figures and media representatives. Minister of Culture and Information, Darkhan Mynbay, emphasized that the new channel is the first in Central Asia to offer state-of-the-art HDTV quality on a par with the highest global standards. The Minister confirmed that state funding for 24 KZ has been allocated for several years to come.

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Also in The News...

- President Nazarbayev launched Kazakhstan's first educational TV channel, Bilim (Knowledge), during an interactive lecture at Nazarbayev University on September 5. Bilim will broadcast in three languages – Kazakh, Russian and English – and offer lectures by leading Kazakhstani and international specialists, as well as popular educational programs, documentaries and programs about higher, secondary and pre-school education.
- The World Economic Forum (WEF) has ranked Kazakhstan 51st in its annual competitiveness rating of world economies. The Report says that “this improvement reflects progress in a number of areas, but most importantly in macroeconomic stability, where the country ranks 16th, and technological readiness, where it advances from 87th to 55th”. Kazakhstan was 72nd in the 2011-2012 Global Competitiveness Rating. The country's closest neighbors, Russia and China, are 67th and 29th, respectively, out of 144 countries.
- Minister of Foreign Affairs Yerzhan Kazykhanov met with the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Karl Lamers in Astana on September 5. Kazykhanov said that a key aim of military cooperation was achieving operational compatibility between Kazakhstan's peacekeeping units and those of western countries. The annual Steppe Eagle military exercise, in which units from NATO countries take part, is scheduled to take place in Almaty this month.
- Senate Chairman Kairat Mami held talks with NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) Chairman Karl Lamers on September 4. They discussed cooperation between Kazakhstan's Parliament and NATO PA. They exchanged views on strengthening security in Central Asia and the activities of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Lamers praised Kazakhstan's contribution to international efforts in Afghanistan and its role in promoting stability and security in the region.
- The Kazakhstan-Austria working group met for the third time to discuss the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between Kazakhstan's Ministry of Industry and New Technologies and Austria's Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology of Austria. Austrian Deputy Federal Minister Andreas Reichhardt said that Austrian companies were interested in participating in projects to modernize Kazakhstan's hydropower stations, as well as in the construction of wind farms in Kazakhstan.
- In August, Kazakhstan's aggregate foreign currency reserves rose by 1.9% to \$83.8 billion, a growth of 14.8% since January. Net foreign currency reserves went up by \$389.2 million during the month, with gold reserves rising by \$190.5 million.
- The 7th Congress of CIS Oncologists and Radiologists opened in Astana on September 5. Participants discussed high-tech treatment and diagnosis methods and medical and social rehabilitation of cancer patients. Kazakhstan's oncologic service currently has 19 cancer detection centers and the Kazakh

Research Institute of Oncology and Radiology. Over 30,000 new cancer cases are detected in the country every year, 47% of them at the early stages thanks to improved diagnostics. In total, 140,000 people in Kazakhstan are registered as suffering from cancer.

- Kazakhstan's national football team has gone up three places to 142nd in the revised rating of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) published this week. The team currently has 196 points. The FIFA rating of 206 countries is led by Spain, Germany and England.
- On September 4 the Astana Track Team won the Tour of East Java team event, the Kazakhstan Bicycling Federation announced on Tuesday. Riders Aleksei Lyalko, Nikita Panasenko, Ivan Tsisaruk, Artem Zakharov and Dmitry Lukianov competed for the professional Astana Track Team formed in 2011. The Tour of East Java is one of a series of Indonesian official racing events of the Union Cycliste International (UCI).
- The Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan has launched its new website <http://www.mfa.kz/en/>, available in Kazakh, Russian and English. The new, eye catching design is a user-friendly and interactive source of up-to-date information on Kazakhstan's foreign policy, tourism, visa and consular issues, media accreditation and more. The new website also enables internet users to contact the Foreign Ministry, read the Minister's blog and statements, and follow him on Twitter.

Things to Watch...

- Days of Culture of Vietnam will be celebrated in Astana from September 9 to 11 during the state visit of the President Vietnam, Truong Tan Sang, on September 10-11. Celebrations will include a gala concert of Vietnamese performers and a photo exhibition “Vietnam: Endless Beauty”.
- This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Conference of Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). As its founder, Kazakhstan is hosting a celebration on September 12 in Astana. This will include a commemorative session with the President's participation and the Fourth CICA Conference of Foreign Ministers.
- On September 12-14 the President of the Republic of Korea, Lee Myung-bak, will pay an official visit to Kazakhstan at the invitation of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. In a series of high-level meetings, he will discuss economic cooperation, cultural relations, education and tourism as well as international and regional issues.
- From September 12-14, the Fourth Meeting of Trade Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries will take place in Almaty, as will the Thematic Meeting on International Trade and Trade Facilitation. Ministers from 30 landlocked countries, all UN Member States (including transit developing countries) and representatives of international organizations will take part in the events.

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