



ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF TURKISTAN REGION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

On June 19, 2018, by the edict of President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, the South Kazakhstan region was renamed the Turkistan region and its administrative center was moved to the city of Turkistan. Shymkent received the status of a city of national significance. Other changes in the administrative-territorial structure of the region included the separation of the Zhetysai and Keles districts from the Maktaaral and Saryagash districts, respectively. At the same time, the state now actively develops a large number of programs and plans to improve the socio-economic situation in the region. Particularly, the comprehensive plan for the socio-economic development of the Turkistan region until 2024 has a special place. The plan consists of 116 organizational and implementation measures.

The development of the regional center is carried out in two directions. The first relates to the upgrading of the historical city of Turkistan as the regional center and the second is the development of strategically important settlements besides the city of Turkistan. A great deal of work is being done in the region to implement these goals. Above all, the problem of housing in the city of Turkistan needs to be solved. In total, 1724 apartments were commissioned in the region by May 2019. In addition, the construction of administrative buildings, museums, theaters, schools, hospitals, and multistoried buildings has begun. Efforts are also under way to improve the city's engineering infrastructure. It should be underlined that modern digital technologies are used in the improvement of the ancient city infrastructure. Such examples include smart stops, "e-shanyraq" smart house, singing fountains and video surveillance on the streets. Moreover, officials come up with optimal solutions for the problems of drinking water, heating and gas supply in the region to improve the quality of life of the population.

It is worth noting that investments are being attracted to increase the economic capacity of the Turkistan region. There are several companies in the region that offer investment services, among which are Turkistan Invest and Khansuar Invest. The main directions of investment attracted to the region are focused on agriculture, alternative energy sources, and the processing sector. The share of output in the processing sector in the region reached 236.9 billion tenge, with 100.7% growth. The gross output of agricultural products amounted to 544.3 billion tenge, which in turn contributes to the creation of new jobs in the region. It should be

mentioned that 3,315 new jobs were created in a year. This is implemented within the entrepreneurship development program for 2017-2021. In addition, the Turkistan economic zone has been created to improve the socio-economic situation in the region. As a result, large-scale construction projects are currently being carried out in the administrative center of the region, the city of Turkistan.

Economic growth for the region, which occupies the first place in terms of agricultural production in Kazakhstan, is directly related to agricultural potential. In this context, there are factories and complexes processing meat, dairy and horticultural products in the region. Indeed, the state provides support to these measures within the Business Road Map-2020 program. Accordingly, the increase in the number of small and medium enterprises in the Turkistan region contributes to the diversification of the region's economy and the development of family entrepreneurship.

Turkistan with its thousands of years of history has a special place in tourism. In the future, this industry should become the main focus of the region's economy. Tourism development in the region has started a long time ago. It is directly related to the burial place (pantheon) of the great people in our history and traditional concepts. In addition, more than 1,000 archaeological monuments in the Turkistan region, located along the Great Silk Road, increase the capacity of the region for ethno-tourism development. The construction of the Museum of Fine Arts of Turkistan, the Country of the Great Steppe Center, the Opera and Ballet Theater, the Center of the Turkic World, and the Kultobe Open Air Museum started in order to develop cultural tourism in the region. Apart from these constructions, nature reserves in the area are the main object of cultural tourism. Besides, the Shardara reservoir in the region has a great potential for the development of beach tourism. In order to increase the tourism potential of Shardara, 120 million tenge will be invested in the work of engineering infrastructure systems. The Saryagash sanatoriums are also available for local tourism. The reason is that resort services at Saryagash are well-known not only in the country but also in the "near abroad". In this context, the Turkistan region entered TOP-10 of the state program for the development of the tourism industry in Kazakhstan until 2025. It is expected that 1.5 million tourists will visit the region each year. In general, after administrative and territorial changes in the region, more than 50% of

industrial production remains in Shymkent. This indicates that the importance of small towns in the region will increase. At the same time, this situation gives an impetus to the creation of new industries in the region and further development of traditional agriculture. Currently, the fertile southern regions of the country account for 12.5% of agricultural production, 100% of cotton, 72.5% of grapes and 80% of greenhouse farming. This is a great opportunity for the economy of the region.

According to the above-mentioned comprehensive plan for the socio-economic development of the Turkistan region until 2024, the volume of the gross regional product in the region in 2024 will increase 1.7 times and amount to 2,552 billion tenge. The main contributions to the gross regional product are as follows: industry – 25.8%; agriculture – 21.7%; and transport and communication – 13.0%. In addition, according to the plan, by 2024 the volume of agricultural production will increase 2.1 times and will amount to 1,025 billion tenge. Industrial production will also increase 1.5 times and will amount to 650 billion tenge. It is expected that 46 projects will be implemented and more than 10,000 new jobs will be created in the industrial sector. By 2024, the number of tourists coming to Turkistan will increase 3 times and the volume of investments will increase 5 times. At present, the foundation of an international airport has been laid that will raise, when completed, the domestic and international status of the region. In addition, a high-speed train between the cities of Turkistan and Tashkent is in the works.

In conclusion, the Turkistan region has experienced significant changes in the economic, social and cultural life within the year since its establishment. The rapid growth of investments in the regional economy and the opening of new business opportunities will contribute to the economic development and social welfare of the region in the future. The modernization and restructuring of cultural facilities in the city of Turkistan increase the importance of the city from a spiritual perspective and provide opportunities for tourism development. As a result, the rapid development of industry, agriculture and service sectors in the region under the comprehensive plan for the socio-economic development of the Turkistan region until 2024 will significantly contribute to the economic and social development of both the southern region of Kazakhstan and the whole country.

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Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- During his working visit to Kazan, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov met with President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov. During the talks, the parties discussed issues in the political, trade-economic, cultural-humanitarian, scientific and educational spheres, as well as perspective directions of cooperation between Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation.
- The delegation of Afghanistan headed by National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib arrived to Turkmenistan on a working visit. During the talks at the Turkmen Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the parties discussed issues of mutual interest, including the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, as well as power lines and fiber-optic communications on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan route.
- A regular meeting of the working groups of the joint Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan intergovernmental commission on the issues of delimitation and demarcation of the interstate border was held in Turkmenabad. During the negotiations, the parties continued to consider proposals on the passage of a project demarcation line and developed draft requirements for carrying out aerial photography at the border.
- During the plenary meeting of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Kazakhstan assumed the chairmanship of this association of 48 states until June 2020. The NSG is the multilateral export control regime that seeks to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons by controlling exports of sensitive nuclear materials, equipment and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.
- Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov met with U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale in Washington. The parties discussed a number of issues on the political agenda of bilateral cooperation, including the current state of the negotiation process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and exchanged views on priority areas for the development of cooperation, including regional energy and transportation projects.
- A regular plenary meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation in Vienna, chaired by Tajikistan, reviewed the OSCE projects in Central Asia on the management of small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition. According to the Tajik side, as part of these activities, 26,000 surplus pieces of arms and 30 tons of excessive conventional ammunition were destroyed in the country.
- The OSCE completed its third cascade training conducted for Tajik border officials in the town of Khorog. Two similar events were conducted earlier this year in the Khatlon and Sughd regions of Tajikistan. As a result of the three two-week training courses, 100 border officers enhanced their knowledge and skills in effectively conducting patrolling, surveillance, first aid and operational planning.

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The 82nd meeting of the CIS Economic Council at the level of vice prime ministers was held in Minsk under the chairmanship of Turkmenistan. The participants reviewed a wide range of issues related to economic cooperation among the CIS member states, including the preparation of a draft agreement on free trade in services.
- The seventh meeting of the joint Belarus-Uzbekistan intergovernmental commission on bilateral cooperation was held in Minsk. The parties exchanged views on current aspects and prospects of their interstate relations and reached agreements on expanding cooperation in agriculture, animal husbandry, the textile and pharmaceutical industries, science and technology, education, tourism and culture.
- At the 18th meeting of the joint Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan intergovernmental commission on bilateral cooperation held in Tashkent, the prime ministers of the two countries discussed ways to deepen partnership in the trade, economic, investment, transport, energy, water use, agricultural, tourism and other sectors. The parties also signed 27 documents worth more than \$1.5 billion, including on the creation of the Central Asia International Trade and Economic Cooperation Center.
- A group of foreign journalists accredited in Uzbekistan, representing the media of Afghanistan, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey, visited the Navoi Free Economic Zone to become acquainted with activities of enterprises created there. As of June 2019, 44 business entities invested \$191.2 million in the zone, and 32 projects worth \$170.9 million are implemented.
- The delegation of Turkmenistan paid a working visit to Afghanistan's Herat province to hold talks with Afghan government officials. The parties discussed issues related to the implementation of the TAPI gas pipeline and signed the agreements on the expansion of the Torgundi-Herat and Aqina-Andkhoi railway projects and on the distribution of electricity to the city of Herat.
- Former British ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic Robin Ord-Smith was elected as the business ombudsman of Kyrgyzstan by a special commission consisting of business groups and associations, Kyrgyz government officials and representatives of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The bank is expected to allocate €1.5 million for the launch of the ombudsman's operations in Kyrgyzstan.
- Tajikistan's State Committee on Investment and State Property Management reportedly signed a license agreement with Kashgar Xinyu Dadi Mining Investment, a company based in China's Xinjiang province, on the development of the Yakchilva (Akjilga) silver deposit located in the remote Murghab district of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province. The deposit, previously explored by Kazakhstan-based C.A. Minerals, is estimated to hold around 205 tons of silver.

Society and Culture

- The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs and Kazakhstan's Ministry of Digital Development, Defense and Aerospace Industry signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in the use of space-based information, space science, technology and applications for advancing the sustainable development goals. The document was signed on the margins of the 62nd session of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space held in Vienna.
- The first Japan-Central Asia forum on environmental protection was held in Tokyo. The program of the forum included sessions on climate change and biodiversity, waste management, water and air pollution, as well as discussions on the efforts of the participating countries in addressing the global environmental agenda and exchanging experience and know-how.
- The OSCE and the Port of Baku launched the project "Promoting Green Ports and Connectivity in the Caspian Sea Region" to support sustainable cooperation between the Caspian Sea ports of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in the fields of renewable energy, digitalization, and trade facilitation. The project will be implemented in partnership with the EBRD, UN Economic Commission for Europe and leading private sector experts.
- 30 young community activists from all seven regions of Kyrgyzstan participated in an intensive three-day training workshop on the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. The event held at Lake Issyk-Kul with the OSCE support raised the participants' awareness of the relevant legal framework, key terms and concepts, principles of tolerance and diversity, and ways to prevent violent extremism.
- During his visit to Tajikistan, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Lamberto Zannier met with Tajik government officials and representatives of ethnic minorities to discuss issues related to the adoption of multilingual education in the country. In particular, he visited an Uzbek language school and the recently reopened department of Uzbek philology at the University of Khujand in Tajikistan's ethnically diverse Sughd province.
- An opening ceremony of the Days of Culture of Turkmenistan in Iran was held in Tehran. The program of the event includes an exhibition of Turkmen arts and crafts, musical instruments and museum valuables, a book exhibition, a round table meeting of culture professionals of the two countries, a show of Turkmen films, and a concert of Turkmen artists.
- According to the 16th edition of the QS World University Rankings, three universities of Kazakhstan entered the list of top 500 higher education institutions. The Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, the Gumilyov Eurasian National University and the Auezov South Kazakhstan State University rank 207th, 418th and 491st, accordingly.