The tourism potential of Turkestan is directly related to the traditions of the region. It is possible to explain it with the cultural and historical artifacts that the city of Turkestan located on the Silk Road. It is obvious that these traditional values have a great influence on the tourist potential of the modern city. We can see Turkestan as the current preservation status of the historical city and the continuation of the medieval style in today’s architectural buildings.

Turkestan has an important place in the development of tourism in the country in recent years. The preservation of medieval monuments in the city has determined the place of Turkestan in cultural tourism. However, in the context of the recent global pandemic, the number of tourists visiting the Turkestan region has decreased sharply. In 2020, 102,512 local and 1,235 foreign in a total of 103,747 tourists visited the Turkestan region. It is known that the number of tourists decreased by 40.5% in 2020 compared to 2019.

Considering the possibilities of modern Turkestan’s touristic development, it has several advantages. The first of these is that the location of the city of Turkestan is suitable for all types of transport in Kazakhstan. For instance, the city has train connections by rail to cities such as Aktove, Oral, Mangistau, Atyrau in the west of Kazakhstan, Semey in the east and Nur-Sultan, Petropavlovsk and Kokshetau in the north. The city also has rail links to Russia’s Chelyabinsk, Moscow, Saratov and Ufa cities. In addition, passenger transportation to Uzbekistan’s Andijan, Tashkent and Kyrgyzstan’s Bishkek cities has been facilitated. In general, there are railway connections to Turkestan with the cities of Shymkent, Kyzylorda, Taraz, Almaty in the south. Bus and taxi services for cities in the south of the country also have an important place in this transportation network. The Hazret Sultan International Airport, which has recently opened in Turkestan, initiates domestic flights and provides connections with countries such as Turkey abroad. Apart from that, there are bus services from Turkestan to many cities of Uzbekistan. These transportation possibilities show that Turkestan’s tourist potential does not have a serious problem with road transportation.

Secondly, nowadays the city of Turkestan has some advantages in terms of development in the tourism sector. For instance, the completion of the construction of many buildings specified in the master plan of the city, shows that new touristic destinations have emerged in Turkestan. The “Keruen Saray” entertainment complex, the “Altun Samruk Theater”, “Sikirli Keruen Complex”, “Showroom Theater” and “Ethnoaul” are among the recently opened buildings. The opening of these facilities will contribute to the increase in the number of tourists.

Thirdly, considering the tourism potential of Turkestan, tourism is developing professionally in this city. The construction of multi-star hotels in the city such as Rixos Turkistan, Karavansaray Kaganat Hotel, Karavansaray Kaganat Kun Hotel, Hampton by Hilton Turkistan and Khanaka may also be linked to the emergence of tourism infrastructure. Because these hotels provide quality and versatile service. This will allow foreign tourists to choose the services and the most suitable hotel. In addition, the opening of the Tourism and Hotel Management University in Turkestan will enable the city to train experts and qualified personnel in the field of tourism in the future.

The last one is the effects of safe tourism, which is one of the habits caused by the pandemic around the world, in the field of tourism. One of them is to provide social distance and security measures in touristic facilities. Most of the modern touristic facilities in Turkestan consist of nature complexes. The increase of different parks makes tourists feel safe. In addition, the opening of police stations in the touristic complexes of the city, the installation of various video surveillance cameras, SOS buttons, and the establishment of police units for tourists can be counted as additional measures in terms of security. It should be noted that there are some problems besides the potential mentioned above. Organized tours from other regions are of great importance for Turkestan, which develops on the basis of local tourism. Various tours are organized especially from Almaty and Shymkent cities to Turkestan. The costs of these tours only include travel expenses, guide fees and entrance fees to various historical and cultural places and facilities. Accommodation and meals are covered by the tourist. In fact, the main problem of local tourists is the high cost of hotels. Because tourists coming by road have to stay in Turkestan for 1-2 days. During this period, local tourists do not have the opportunity to stay in the above-mentioned multi-star hotels. This shows that tourists face difficulties in accommodation. Due to the fact that some affordable hotels are located far from the center of Turkestan, most individual tourists are forced to choose city tours.

As a result, the potential of the tourism sector in Turkestan is enlarging with the relatively new places that attract the attention of the tourists. Particularly, “Keruen Saray” and “Turkestan’s Venice” spark great interest among the tourists who visit the city. In addition to that Turkestan has a special place in local tourism, including the development of ethno tourism, which is an example for many regions. Also, new trends in post-pandemic tourism plan to promote urban tourism. It is clear that this will allow tourists to comply with sanitary norms and organize tours using digital technologies. In this context, the tourism sector of Turkestan tries to attract as many tourists as possible by announcing its opportunities through various touristic sites. In addition, the restriction of the activities of various touristic facilities (museums, art centers) due to the pandemic constitutes the basis for the formation of new non-traditional tourism areas such as photo tourism, agricultural tourism, eco-tourism in the Turkestan region.

Written by Daulet Zhailybayev, Eurasian Research Institute, Kazakhstan
The President of Turkmenistan Gurban-Myrdan Berdymukhamedov had a phone conversation with the President of China Xi Jinping. The leaders discussed perspectives of bilateral cooperation and issues of regional and international agenda. The leaders expressed satisfaction with the current high level of comprehensive cooperation. Beside the significance of the traditional oil and gas industries, the parties noted the importance of collaboration in the fields of trade, transport, textile and chemical industries (Kabar, 07.05.2021).

Berik Uali, the Press Secretary of the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev would pay an official visit to Tajikistan on May 19-20. Tokayev had a phone conversation with his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon. Presidents will discuss issues of strategic partnership, including further strengthening of political dialogue and enhancement of trade and economic cooperation. The leaders will pay a special attention to the regional cooperation issues, in particular ensuring stability and security in Central Asia (Kazinform, 04.05.2021).

The President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko had a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Presidents discussed issues of comprehensive cooperation, confirmed the early completed plans to increase bilateral trade to $1.5 billion, and agreed to assist in their implementation. President Erdogan extended Victory Day greetings to Belarusian nation, while President Lukashenko extended Ramadan greetings to the Muslim population (BelTA, 07.05.2021).

The President of Kyrgyz Republic Sadyr Japarov signed the new Constitution and the related Law “On the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic”. The signing ceremony took place at the Ala-Archa state residence. The referendum on the new Constitution was held on April 11, 2021, and more than 79% of the citizens who participated in the elections voted for the new Constitution. In accordance with the new Constitution, the form of government in Kyrgyzstan has changed from parliametary to republican (Kabar, 05.05.2021).

Tashkent hosted a regular meeting of the Council of National Coordinators (SNC) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states. The agenda of the meeting included over 60 issues of the current activities of the organization. The national coordinators reviewed the preparations for the main event - the meeting of the leaders of the SCO member states, to be held in September 2021 (Eurasianpress, 03.05.2021).

Kazakhstan and Turkey signed a plan in Ankara for prospects of military cooperation between the two states. The document includes 17 events in the field of regional security, training of special forces and border guards. Exchanged experience on the tactics of using reconnaissance and attack unmanned vehicles are also mentioned in the document. The sides also considered a plan for training military personnel in the 2022-2023 academic year (Kazinform, 04.05.2021).

Authorities of Kazakhstan plan to increase budget spending by $3 billion during the next three years. Consequently, the yearly budget expenditures will increase to $35 billion. During 2 months of 2021, a share of social assistance and benefits in the total budget equalled 25%. Expenditures on healthcare increased by more than 70% compared to the same period of 2020, amounting to over $1.1 billion. Education expenses increased by 7.3% or $1.1 billion. Analysts mention that expenditures grew in almost all sectors (Qazaq TV, 05.05.2021).

During the Uzbek-Saudi intergovernmental commission, which was held on May 3, 2021 in Riyadh, the Islamic Development Bank announced its readiness to support entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. A special Economic Cooperation Support Fund will be established for this purpose. In 2021, the Saudi Development Fund financed 10 projects in Uzbekistan worth $300 million. After the meeting, the governments signed several important agreements in the field of energy and agriculture, and the final protocol on the main directions of the long-term bilateral cooperation (UzReport, 06.05.2021).

In 2021, bilateral trade between Belarus and Uzbekistan demonstrated a significant progress. In the first quarter of the year, trade volume amounted to $67.5 million and increased by 25.3% compared to the same period of the previous year. Exports of Belarus grew by 37.4% reaching $54.7 million, while imports from Uzbekistan surged by $8.8 million or 79.2%. As a result, Belarus’ trade surplus peaked at $7.8 million. Belarus’ main supply items include chilled and frozen food, medicines, polymers and tractors (BelTA, 07.05.2021).

Recently, a delegation of Lithuania led by the country’s Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis visited Azerbaijan. During a meeting with the delegation, Azerbaijan’s Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov mentioned that the countries increased mutual trade turnover in 2020 and in the first quarter of 2021, despite the pandemic. The trade volume amounted to $24.4 million in 2020 and reached $7.6 million in the first quarter of 2021. The countries have so far signed 39 documents and 12 more are under consideration (AzerNews, 04.05.2021).

The World Bank and the government of Ukraine continue to strengthen bilateral cooperation. Recently, the bank approved a $200 million credit to support the country’s efforts to improve the quality and transparency of the higher education system. In particular, the project will finance modernization of teaching and research facilities and digital learning infrastructure of higher education institutions in line with European standards in order to equip young Ukrainians with the skills they need for the 21st century (Ukrinform, 06.05.2021).

A working group consisting of officials from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China recently conducted a videoconference, where they discussed perspectives of Uzbekistan – Kyrgyzstan – China railway construction. China’s representatives presented a model for financing the project and the action plan for 2021. The parties mentioned the importance of finding a consensus in resolving the issue of financing and approval of the routes of the railway. They agreed to conduct field research work after the stabilization of the epidemiological situation (Kabar, 04.05.2021).

The Pre}