

Kazakh President Stars as Hero of a Fairy Tale

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President Nursultan Nazarbayev

ALMATY, Kazakhstan — The life story of Kazakhstan's president has already been the subject of a glowing cinematic biopic and a play. Now, it is getting the fairy-tale treatment.

A newly published book heralds Nursultan Nazarbayev's achievements on the international diplomatic scene in the form of illustrated fables, state news agency Kazinform reported.

The book, titled "Leader of the Nation Nursultan," was published to coincide with the president's 71st birthday on July 6.

Government critics say such exercises are part of attempts to build a personality cult around Nazarbayev, who has ruled the oil-rich Central Asian nation since the 1980s, when it was still part of the Soviet Union.

But author Roza Akbolatova says the bright illustrations accompanying her stories will help make politics more accessible to children.

And if one fawning book wasn't enough, Akbolatova has written another: an essay illustrated with photos of meetings between Nazarbayev and well-known figures in Kazakhstan that is confusingly also called "Leader of the Nation Nursultan."

Kazakhs are used to such effusive praise of their president: Posters bearing his image and laudatory slogans dot the countryside, and reports on state media are filled with his accomplishments.

Nazarbayev was re-elected as president with an astonishing 95 percent of the vote in an April election that was criticized by international observers. Days later, a movie was released in the country's theaters giving a glowing account of Nazarbayev's childhood. The \$3 million film was released on DVD this month, also to coincide with birthday festivities.

This month also saw the premiere of "Deep Roots," a play that reportedly charts Nazarbayev's role in leading his country to independence in the form of an allegory.

Kazakhstan hosted numerous grandiose festivities in the run-up to the anniversary of the capital, Astana, which happens to fall on Nazarbayev's birthday. The city, which was made capital in 1997, was built virtually from scratch at Nazarbayev's behest and has long been touted as the centerpiece of an increasingly modern Kazakhstan.

Rock star Sting soured the mood, however, when he pulled out of a concert, citing reservations over how Kazakh authorities have allegedly been mistreating oil workers on strike.

Last week, Nazarbayev disappeared from public view for a few days during what his office called a short vacation. German media reports said he underwent a prostate operation in Hamburg. Nazarbayev returned to work at the end of the week.

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