

Turkmenistan's Leader Adds to Achievements by Penning Novel

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ASHGABAT — Turkmenistan's authoritarian president has added to his already long list of achievements by turning to novel-writing.

State television in the energy-rich Central Asian nation reported Monday that Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov's novel, "The Bird of Happiness," tells the life story of the leader's father.

Berdymukhamedov, a trained dentist, has been working on the novel since childhood, the report said.

State media regularly devotes substantial coverage to Berdymukhamedov's exploits in a bid to project an image of him as a polymath and sporting champion.

He has authored several books, including tomes on traditional medicinal herbs

and Turkmenistan's much-admired Akhal-Teke horse breed.

Berdymukhamedov is also frequently shown indulging in and excelling at sporting activities.

In September, he took part in a car race and proceeded to win it.

Berdymukhamedov narrowly escaped serious injury in April, however, after falling off a horse during a national horse racing event. State media reported only that he had won the race, but footage filmed by foreign reporters that trickled out of the tightly controlled former Soviet state in the days following showed Berdymukhamedov flying over his horse's head and landing heavily on the ground.

Berdymukhamedov came to power in late 2006 after his eccentric predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov, died suddenly from a sudden heart attack.

Niyazov also penned books. His Rukhnama spiritual guide, which was mandatory reading for government officials and schoolchildren, formed a central pillar in a bizarre cult of personality.

Official adulation for Berdymukhamedov has been relatively more restrained and much of the state-led hero worship is also directed at the leader's father, Myalikhuly.

In August the president unveiled a five-meter bronze bust of Myalikhuly Berdymukhamedov in honor of his 81st birthday.

Turkmenistan is one of the nine worst countries in the world on human rights issues, according to U.S.-based rights watchdog Freedom House.

The Central Asian desert nation of 5 million is also the world's fourth-largest producer of natural gas, according to BP's Statistical Review of World Energy 2013.

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