The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Turkmenistan's President Cements Personality Cult With Golden Statue

By The Moscow Times

May 25, 2015



People gather in front of a monument to Turkmenistan's President Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov during its inauguration ceremony in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, May 25, 2015.

Turkmenistan unveiled the first monument to President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov on Monday — a gilded 6-meter-high statue of the leader on horseback perched on a white cliff, reflecting his flourishing personality cult in the reclusive gas-rich nation.

Berdymukhamedov, a 57-year-old dentist, is officially titled Arkadag ("The Patron") and brooks no dissent.

"Glory to Arkadag!" chanted students as white doves and balloons were released into the sky in a central square in the capital Ashgabat. The president did not attend the ceremony.

Wielding sweeping powers, he is also prime minister and commander in chief of the mainly Muslim Central Asian country which holds the world's fourth-largest reserves of natural gas.

Critics say his administration is one of the world's most repressive, while Europe sees Turkmenistan as a future alternative route of natural gas supplies, bypassing Russia.

Parliament unanimously passed an order to erect the statue, which joins a mosque already named in his honor and innumerable giant portraits dotting the desert nation.

"Arkadag works for the glory of our people from dawn to dusk," gray-bearded elder Rakhman Geldyev said at the opening.

Berdymukhamedov, lionized in songs and poems by palace poets, has ruled Turkmenistan since the death of his flamboyant predecessor Saparmurat Niyazov in 2006.

Berdymukhamedov's monument, gilded with 24-carat gold, reflects his fondness for local Akhal Teke horses, known for their beauty and stamina.

In April 2013, local television showed Berdymukhamedov winning the final stretch of a race on a shimmering straw-colored steed.

A few days later, a leaked video showed the president falling headfirst onto the track just after crossing the finishing line.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/05/25/turkmenistans-president-cements-personality-cult-with-golden-statue-a46824