



El D'a de los Muertos

People dressed and painted as 'Catrinas'.



A boy with his face painted as a 'Catrina' has his picture taken.



A woman dressed up and with her face painted as a 'Catrina' takes part in a Day of the Dead celebration in Mexico City.



A woman dressed as a 'Catrina', Mexico's grand dame of death, attends an alebrijes parade in Mexico City, Saturday. Alebrijes are colorful sculptures that combine components of different animals to create a unique fantastical creature. The term was penned by Mexico City folk artist Pedro Linares, who originated the art form in the 1930s based on creatures he dreamt about during a severe illness, which he began recreating after his recovery. — AP photos



A young girl with her face painted as a 'Catrina'.



Traditional dancers from Folklorica Tapaio from Oceanside, Calif. prepare themselves before their performance at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery to celebrate Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead).



A woman and a girl with their faces painted as 'Catrinas' listen to a band playing music as part of the Day of the Dead celebration.



Isabelle Aubin, from Paris, France arrives for the celebrations at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery for Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles.



Women stand under a billboard advertising the reality TV show 'House of Scales' in Almaty on October 20, 2015. — AFP

Supersized **Kazakhs** battle to drop pounds in hit show

Gulmira Jumagulova, a 125-kilogramme (275-pound) contestant on a popular Kazakhstan fat camp reality show, is still haunted by the words of a boyfriend who dumped her mid-pregnancy. "He told me 'I could never introduce you to my relatives. How would you even get into a wedding dress?'" says Jumagulova, 28, on the House of Scales show broadcast by the Russian-owned 31.kz channel. The taunt was made worse by the fact that Jumagulova, now a single mother, often finds herself capturing the joy of other couples' weddings as part of her job as a professional photographer. "I feel I am limiting my son's enjoyment. I cannot go on the rides at theme parks because I cannot squeeze into them," she said during the show's second season. "We have to watch from the sidelines."

Jumagulova is one of 16 contestants packed into a glass-and-steel house and monitored around the clock as they bid to lose a collective 500 kilos of body fat. The contestants also have to avoid getting voted off each week by the public, while competing individually for the main prize of around \$350,000 (320,000 euros). Most of the contestants, put through their paces by demanding trainers and counselled by in-house psychologists, are in their 20s and 30s. They are the first generation to grow up in the age of globalization and fast food in the former Soviet state which has grown rich on its oil production.

one in four of Kazakhstan's adult population is obese, making it the fourth fattest former Soviet country behind Lithuania, Russia and Latvia. "In Communist times, many of these calorie-rich foods were simply not available," says Batyrbek Taizhanov, the winner of House of Scales' first season, who trimmed down from 178 kg to 129 kg and met his current wife while on the show. "Now we are hurrying everywhere, not thinking about what we are shoving in our mouths: A burger with lots of calories or a can of cola stuffed with sugar."

While the show filmed in the Central Asian country's largest city Almaty has enjoyed massive ratings, it has also been criticized as exploitative. The first season saw contestants frequently break down due to isolation from family and friends, who can only watch them through the glass walls, as well as the strenuous exercise routine. They also must battle the ever-present temptation of sweet food, which is allowed in the house. The Kazakh Academy of Nutrition, which monitors the country's weight problem, told AFP in a statement that the show "does not correlate to modern knowledge, or approach (obesity) from either a scientific or ethical point of view."

Unabashed, 31.kz promised that season two, which kicked off this month, will be "more realistic, tougher and more interesting". Asel Toyanova, general producer of the 31.kz channel, defended the show, saying it "helps people transform their lives." "Other than excess weight, many of the participants have problems in their personal lives which may have caused this problem or resulted

from it," Toyanova told AFP. "Our show has allowed people to talk about these issues and find solutions to them."

'I owe the show a lot'

Authoritarian Kazakhstan has seen rapid economic growth since 2000, mostly on the back of high oil prices, and growing wealth has attracted Western fast food franchises such as Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken, with McDonalds set to open soon. Some say the trend for fast food is squeezing out traditional dishes, such as beshbarmak, a meat and noodle specialty that translates as "five fingers" and is often eaten with the hands. As pizzas and fries encroach on home cooking, the government has also sounded the alarm over the growing number of obese children.

To burn off the extra pounds, the country has developed a Western-style personal fitness culture with increasing numbers of plush private gyms catering to a growing middle class. House of Scales' first winner Taizhanov, who now regularly trains at a gym himself, says the reality show has changed his life. "I owe the show a lot. I won a lot of money, I met the love of my life, I weigh just over 100 kilograms now and I want to weigh 80. A person needs to have goals to pursue. What is a life without goals?" he told AFP. — AFP

Changing tastes, growing waists

According to World Health Organization data for 2014, nearly