

# Text of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's Address to the Oliy Majlis



Distinguished deputies and senators!

Dear compatriots!

Esteemed guests!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Uzbekistan has been entering a new decade. Our achievements become history, life sets new requirements for us, great opportunities open up to spearhead transformation even deeper. Therefore, today, we should determine priority areas and tracks for the development of our nation in 2020 and for the next five years in general.

In line with outcomes of the recent vote under the slogan “New Uzbekistan, New Elections”, a new political environment is shaping out in the country, allowing us to raise the current democratic reforms to a higher level.

825 observers from almost 50 countries and 10 international organizations attended the elections that took place in openness and transparency as well as complying with international standards. For the first time, we worked closely with the full-fledged, 316-member mission of the Bureau for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

International observers maintained that the elections were held in an environment of healthy competition, heated debates and discussions among political parties, with a significantly increased role for the media.

On behalf of our people I express sincere gratitude to all international monitors for the objective opinions and recommendations regarding the improvement of the electoral process in Uzbekistan.

We will deeply study each of these recommendations, adopt and widely implement a corresponding program. In this respect, an important challenge we face is to bolster the electoral culture of the population and the political activity of parties, as well as to boost their work with their constituents.

Meanwhile, special emphasis ought to be placed on the perfection of three-stage system of elections to local Kengashes and consolidation of the role of district and municipal election commissions in this process.

The parliament and the Central Election Commission need to work closely together in the realization of the objectives outlined following the elections.

I would like to appeal to the deputies and senators and in their person to the entire people of Uzbekistan: democratic reforms are the only right way for us. Building on this, we will continue to constantly work in this direction, study the best foreign practices and strive to change our life, our work style and methods.

We have set ourselves a gracious goal to build a new Uzbekistan together with our people. On this path, a new principle is being affirmed more and more deeply in our life, in accordance with which “society is initiator of reforms”.

We need to secure even greater activity of citizens in raising the effectiveness of reforms, in spearheading new initiatives on the ground.

Crucially, as a result of this transformation, we must deliver everything conducive for a prosperous life in this country. We should create the most favorable business environment and investment climate, increase the number of new enterprises and jobs in order to provide our people with decent income. To be sure,

should we fail to perform this extremely important job, no one will do it for us.

Our people should understand well: we have a long and difficult path ahead of us. If we all go forward together, gain modern knowledge, work honestly and fruitfully, our life, our entire society will certainly change for the better.

I believe you share this conviction.

Dear participants of the meeting!

Thanks to the dedicated job of our nation, we furthered significant goals in 2019, in the Year of Active Investments and Social Development.

Investment inflow has considerably grown. Foreign direct investments amounted to 4.2 billion US dollars, which is \$ 3.1 billion or 3.7 times as much as in 2018. The share of investments in gross domestic product reached 37 percent.

For the first time, Uzbekistan received an international credit rating and successfully placed \$ 1 billion worth of bonds on the global financial market. For the first time in 10 years, our country's position in the credit risk rating of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has improved.

Profound structural transformations have started in the energy sector, the oil and gas industry, geology, transport, road construction, agriculture and water management, drinking water supply, heat supply and a number of other areas. In 12 leading spheres, modernization and competitiveness programs are being implemented. As a result, last year the economic growth rate amounted to 5.6 percent. Industrial production increased by 6.6 percent, exports swelled by 28 percent. Gold and foreign exchange reserves grew by \$ 2.2 billion to reach \$ 28.6 billion.

In agriculture, measures are being taken to enhance the interest of farmers and dehkans, introduce advanced technologies and switch to a cluster production system. Efforts on this front are in full swing.

We are working hard for the extensive development of entrepreneurship and to create new opportunities for this purpose. During the realization of the program "Each Family Entrepreneur", loans totaling 5.9 trillion soums were allocated to family-based startups.

As part of the tax reform, the tax burden on wages has been reduced by almost 1.5 times. As a result, the number of employees in the formal sector of the economy increased during the year by 500 thousand.

The value added tax rate has been cut from 20 to 15 percent. Thanks to this, 2 trillion soums remained with taxpayers last year. This year, this figure is expected to reach 11 trillion soums. The fact that so much money is left at the disposal of entrepreneurs in one year opens up enormous additional opportunities for the development of their business.

Reforms resulted in the establishment of 93 thousand new business entities last year, almost double the 2018 figures.

In the Doing Business ranking of the World Bank, we have risen by 7 positions to come 8th among 190 nations in terms of business registration, and are among the best reformer countries.

We have introduced a visa-free regime for citizens of 86 states and a simplified visa regime for 57 ones. Consequently, 6.7 million tourists from abroad visited our country last year, which is 4.7 million or 3.3 times greater than in 2016.

In 2019, a total of 5,722 public, private and family kindergartens were established. Thus, within one year alone, the coverage of children with preschool education grew from 38 to 52 percent.

Educational institutions of a completely new type began to operate in Uzbekistan, including 4 presidential and 3 literary creative schools. Along with this, 19 new higher education institutions were created,

including 9 branches of celebrated foreign universities. In cooperation with leading academic establishments abroad, training has been launched in the framework of 141 joint educational programs. In 2019, a total of 146,500 students were admitted to universities in Uzbekistan, which is double the number in 2016.

We have introduced a procedure for the full payment of pensions to working pensioners. The amount of benefits to socially vulnerable and low-income groups of population in need of social support has doubled.

In the healthcare system, along with public medical institutions, the role of private sector in the sphere has also been growing rapidly. As a result of the expansion in the list of medical service types from 50 to 126 and the provision of a number of benefits, 634 private medical institutions were created last year.

Within the framework of the Obod Qishloq (Prosperous Village) and Obod Mahalla (Prosperous Mahalla) programs, large-scale construction and improvement works were carried out in 479 villages and auls, as well as 116 urban mahallas. 6.1 trillion soums were directed for these purposes – a 1.5 trillion soums increase from 2018 sums.

The number of affordable and comfortable housing built, namely, individual houses and apartments in high-rise buildings, totaled 34,700, including 17,100 in the village and 17,600 in cities, which is almost thrice as many as in 2016.

More than 116 billion soums were allocated for five thousand low-income families and families in need of better housing conditions, including women with disabilities, to pay down mortgage payments.

The reforms we are undertaking have been receiving decent evaluation from the international community. In particular, one of the world's eminent publications, the Economist magazine named Uzbekistan the Country of the Year, a nation with fastest of the reforms in 2019. I think you agree with me that such an assessment affords us a sense of pride, an even more strength, and inspires us to eye new heights.

Dear compatriots!

Having critically analyzed the work performed by us last year, I would like to highlight the following.

First, executives of all levels should not relax and indulge in euphoria from the initial positive results achieved.

The principal objective before the new parliament and government over the next five years is to raise the living standards of our multiethnic people.

In this regard, I would like to appeal to the distinguished deputies: it is essential to devise and execute specific programs and “roadmaps” together with interested departments to address urgent issues raised by the population during electoral campaign meetings. Otherwise, members of parliament may lose the confidence of their voters, and parties may lose their authority. Indeed, both thinking and worldview as well as the needs of our people today have changed dramatically.

Second, we have a lot to do to elevate the quality of the governance system and establish the fundamental principle in society, whereby “it is not the people who should serve the government, but the government should serve the people”.

The fact that more than 1 million appeals from citizens are received annually in the Virtual and People's Reception Offices of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan indicates the need to lift dialogue with the people to a new level.

From now on, a system will be established whereby reports of heads of government bodies and hokims on how to resolve issues raised in citizens' appeals will be regularly heard in the national parliament and Kengashes of people's representatives.

The distribution of additional revenues of local budgets, the fair assignment of benefits, the assessment of the work of executives will now be carried out on the basis of an analysis of appeals to the People's Reception Offices.

Lawmakers should constantly interact with the People's Reception Offices and actively participate in addressing the problems in their constituencies, and live with the concerns of people. Only that way will deputies be able to fulfill their promises, meet the confidence of the people and earn their respect. In that case, I will be deeply grateful to you not only as the President, but also as an ordinary voter.

Third, we had set ourselves a goal of joining the ranks of advanced nations and we can only achieve it by accelerating reforms, by relying on science, education and innovation.

To do this, we first of all need to foster specialists of the new formation, who initiate the reforms, have a strategic vision, thorough knowledge and high qualifications. That is the reason we started reforming all education layers from preschool to higher professional.

Science and education are of paramount importance for enhancing the intellectual and spiritual potential of young people as much as our entire society. Societies failing to promote science suffer regression and backwardness.

The brilliant thinkers of the East used to say that "the greatest wealth is reason and science, the greatest inheritance is good education, while the greatest poverty is the lack of knowledge."

The desire to obtain modern knowledge, to be enlightened and to have a high culture should become a vital need for all of us.

In order to achieve sustainable development, we must deeply master digital knowledge and information technology, to enable us to take the shortest path to comprehensive progress. In today's world, digital technology plays a crucial role in all areas.

Despite the fact that in the International Index of Information and Communication Technologies our country has risen by 8 positions in 2019, we still vastly lag behind on this front. It is no exaggeration to say that most of our ministries and departments as well as enterprises are far from the full implementation of digital technologies.

To be sure, we all well understand that the formation of a digital economy will require appropriate infrastructure, immense resources and specialists. Yet, no matter how tricky it is, we must begin this work today, not tomorrow. Therefore, accelerated transition to digital economy will come to be our priority for the next five years.

It is known that digital technologies not only improve the quality of products and services, reduce costs, but are also an effective tool in fighting corruption, the gravest problem that bothers me very much.

The widespread introduction of digital technologies contributes to the effectiveness of public administration, to the development of the social sphere, in a word, a radical improvement in people's lives.

Esteemed compatriots!

Distinguished representatives-elect!

In order to steadily continue the endeavors we began some time ago to promote science and education and bring those efforts to a new, modern level, to nurture our youth as personalities with profound knowledge, high culture and spirituality, create a competitive economy, I propose to declare the year 2020 in our country as the Year of Science, Education and Digital Economy.

In order to cardinaly reform and develop the sectors identified in the name of the year, we have to carry out large-scale work. In particular, we must secure the extent of coverage of children with preschool

education at 60 percent in the coming year. 1.8 trillion soums will be assigned from the budget for these purposes.

For the first time in our country, a system of preparing children for school from the age of 6 will be introduced. 130 billion soums are allocated from the budget for these purposes. Private preschool educational institutions will also participate in this process.

In 2020, thanks to 1.7 trillion soums of budget assignments, 36 new schools will be erected and 211 more will be overhauled. It is also envisaged to establish 55 private schools, bringing their total number to 141.

We will introduce a system of progressive remuneration for teachers with extensive pedagogical skills and relevant qualifications who have made specific achievements.

It is necessary to improve school curricula based on international best practices, revise the teaching load and the disciplines studied, bring them into line with international standards, and improve the quality of textbooks and educational literature.

To prepare for the upcoming introduction in 2021 of the international system of school education assessment in Uzbekistan, 348 basic schools will be identified, and more than 6 thousand teachers will be trained with corresponding proficiency.

From the current academic year, a completely new system of vocational education has been introduced, 340 vocational schools, 147 colleges and 143 technical schools will be organized.

In order to ensure that staff qualifications meet the requirements of the international labor market, we need to introduce a National Qualifications System to allow us to train specialists in almost 9 thousand subjects.

We are obliged to deliver all essential conditions for our youths who strive for higher education, self-improvement, and who want to devote their lives to science. Therefore, we will bring the enrollment of high school graduates at higher education institutions to at least 25 percent in 2020 and up to 50-60 percent in the future.

I should note here that growth in the enrollment in higher education should not be achieved only through fee-paid basis. Thus I propose to double the share of government scholarships at universities.

Separate fellowships will be allocated for girls. The Women's Committee shall develop criteria for selecting candidates for training based on such grants.

It is necessary to optimize admission exams to higher educational institutions, to pay special attention to the simplification of entrance procedures, and get universities to provide with really needed knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to create a national testing system for assessing knowledge of the mother tongue. The applicant should have the opportunity to take this exam at any time and receive a certificate, and as a result, with no need to re-pass tests in native language before admission.

Building on foreign experience, higher education standards will be improved, the directions and the structure of disciplines studied will be reviewed. The number of subjects not related to the major sought will be halved.

We must move on to a credit-modular system in higher education. Starting from this year, along 6 majors in pedagogical education, a 3-year period of study will be introduced.

Such changes will be implemented in other directions, too.

Higher educational institutions will be gradually granted academic and financial independence. This year 10 universities will transfer to self-financing. In addition, on a competitive basis, we will identify at least 5 universities and, together with leading foreign institutions, we will begin their transformation.

We have to determine specific priorities in the field of science. Not a single state is capable of developing all branches of science simultaneously. Therefore, every year we will pay attention to the development of a few important areas.

This year, measures will be taken to extensively promote fundamental and applied research in such fields as mathematics, chemistry, biology, geology, and create everything required for scientists. It is also necessary to radically revise the mechanism for providing targeted grants for basic and innovative research.

It is vital to form an electronic platform of scholarly achievements, a database of domestic and foreign scientific developments. Each higher educational and research institution needs to establish cooperation with leading foreign universities and research centers.

This year, the El-Yurt Umidi (Hope of the Nation) Foundation will send more than 700 scientists, professors and teachers abroad to conduct research and undergo further training.

In the future, we need to double the number of fellowships and expand research areas.

In 2020, we must take a radical turn in the development of digital economy. First and foremost, it is essential to fully digitalize a number of spheres, including construction and energy industries, agriculture and water management, transport, geology, cadastre, healthcare, education, archiving. In the meantime, the e-government system, the programs and projects implemented within its framework should be critically reviewed, and all organizational and institutional issues be comprehensively addressed.

Currently, an IT Park with modern infrastructure is being created in Tashkent. We already see the first results of these efforts. Such high-tech venues will also be instituted in Nukus, Bukhara, Namangan, Samarkand, Gulistan and Urgench.

In order to train highly qualified specialists in the field of information technology, the project “A million programmers” has been launched together with our foreign partners.

Modern information technologies ought to be introduced at all stages of the education system.

Considering that last year, all cities and regional centers were connected to high-speed internet networks, we should provide all villages and mahallas with this opportunity in the next two years.

Today, more than 7 thousand healthcare, preschool and school education institutions have high-speed internet access, and in two years this number will increase by another 12 thousand. Given all these tasks, we need to complete devising the Digital Uzbekistan 2030 program in two months.

In the future, to coordinate this work on a systemic basis, the Prime Minister, heads of ministries and other government agencies as well as hokims will be assigned deputies of their own responsible for this field.

It is advisable for parliament to regularly hear reports from the government, industry and regional executives on the course of work to develop science, education and digital economy.

Dear members of parliament!

Now let me dwell on the program and target tasks in the economic sphere, which we must complete in 2020 and subsequent years.

First, our main task this year is to ensure macroeconomic stability and curb inflation in the process of economic reform.

Starting from this year, we have begun implementing the inflation targeting system. In this work, the Ministry of Economy and Industry, the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance should secure a balance of economic growth and inflation, and take into account external risks.

Today, the state regulates prices for 37 types of goods and services, which negatively affects free competition. In this regard, in the future, key attention should be paid not to determining prices, but to lowering them and improving product quality given healthy competition among enterprises.

With an eye to international experience, it is required to open the way for private sector in those monopolistic spheres where conditions for competition and the formation of a competitive environment can be created. In this regard, we should update laws on natural monopolies and competition, as well as develop a strategy for the formation of a competitive environment.

The only way to ensure stable prices for products in the consumer market is to boost the production of fruits and vegetables, livestock and other foods, and establish an effective unremitting chain “field – counter”. The government, together with local authorities, must ensure that this task is completed.

Oversight of the targeted and rational use of budget funds should be strengthened.

This year we have determined the maximum upper limit of public external debt. From now on, serious attention will be paid to the study of payback and the effective use of loans from international financial organizations. The Cabinet of Ministers is instructed to elaborate draft laws on state financial oversight and on public debt with the help of international experts within three months.

Unless we get rid of the shadow economy, which seriously impedes our reforms, there can be no talk of creating healthy competition and a favorable investment climate.

Within two months, the Cabinet of Ministers, with the engagement of foreign experts, needs to deeply analyze the factors behind the emergence of shadow economy and approve a program to combat it.

Currently, to restore order in the market of alcohol and tobacco products, we have begun introducing a digital labeling system for goods. In the future, we will use the same system in the sphere of pharmaceutical product turnover.

The Cabinet of Ministers should take under strict control the project of introducing digital marking and online cash desks, which is carried out through direct investments in the amount of \$ 200 million.

Second, for the economic development at a high pace, we need to consistently continue an active investment policy.

This year, investments of \$ 23 billion will be mastered with the commissioning of 206 new large production facilities. In particular, at the Shurtan Gas Chemical Complex, capacities for the production of liquid synthetic fuel will be launched, while nitric acid, ammonia and urea are to be produced in the joint-stock company Navoiazot. We will commission the Tashkent Metallurgical Plant, the Sergeli branch of the Tashkent Metro, and complete the first phase of the overground ring metro construction.

I would like to emphasize that a significant part of investments processed in 2020 will be foreign direct investments and loans.

In order to support investors, we are introducing installment plans for paying taxes and for partially compensating for the costs of creating infrastructure. Along with this, the practice of deduction of expenses for the purchase of new technological equipment, construction and modernization of new facilities during the calculation of income tax has been expanded.

A stock-taking of about 3 thousand enterprises with a state share should be carried out and measures be taken to drastically reduce government participation in areas where the private sector and competition are developing.

It is necessary to implement new projects at such strategic enterprises as the Navoi and Almalyk mining and metallurgical plants, and at the same time turn these enterprises into full-fledged participants in the international financial market. To do this, in 2020, it is essential to complete the preparation of financial

reports based on international standards and revaluation of stocks, and introduce modern corporate governance.

In the oil and gas sector, with the involvement of foreign experts, we need to raise the efficiency of managing state-owned enterprises and optimize costs, and achieve reduction in existing debt.

In view of these tasks, the Cabinet of Ministers is tasked with devising – within two months – a strategy of managing and reforming enterprises with state share.

In order to actively attract foreign investors, it is crucial to hold the Tashkent International Investment Forum at a high organizational level in March this year.

One of the effective means of attracting investment is the mechanism of public-private partnership, which should be widely implemented in the fields of transportation, energy, road construction, utilities, healthcare, education and other spheres.

Currently, the construction industry has become one of the important drivers of the economy. This is also confirmed by the fact that its share in gross domestic product has exceeded 6 percent. In order to further develop the industry, it is necessary to harmonize norms and rules in construction field with international standards, introduce modern building technologies and materials, and radically reform the training system. At the same time, specific criteria for bidding should be worked out and information technologies be extensively used in this system.

The Cabinet of Ministers is instructed to develop, within two months, a strategy for the development of the construction industry through to 2025.

Third, we need to take decisive measures this year to develop the banking system.

Unfortunately, the banking system lags behind modern requirements for 10-15 years, especially in terms of the development of digital technologies, introduction of new banking products and software.

Starting from 2020, a large-scale transformation program will be implemented in each bank. Our focus will be on increasing the capital, resource base and profitability of banks.

In the banking system, we should establish the activities of the “factory of projects” aimed at supporting entrepreneurs.

Our banks must enter the international financial markets, attract affordable and long-term resources. It is advisable to issue Eurobonds this year by the National Bank and Ipoteka Bank.

Banks with a state share will be gradually sold to strategic investors.

The main goal of reforms in the banking sector is to teach commercial banks the principles of customer-oriented work.

In order to train modern personnel, the Banking and Finance Academy will be completely reorganized with the help of foreign specialists. In order to introduce modern banking practice and management, new banking services in state-owned banks have been launched, so has the hiring of qualified specialists from leading foreign financial institutions. Efforts in this direction will be continued.

Bank software should be radically upgraded through the widespread introduction of modern information technologies. By July 1 this year, it is vital to launch the information system of “credit histories” in full.

It is important to build public confidence in the banking system and not allow outside interference in the activities of banks.

Fourth, the production of competitive products, the search for new international markets, enhancement of exports, full use of transit potential are key to sustainable economic growth.

This year, the Export Support Fund will be set up to provide exporters with a guarantee and compensate for part of their expenses, as well as the Export Credit Agency, which will organize pre-export financing. It is planned to introduce modern export insurance services, mechanisms for compensating for part of the costs of using automobile and air transport.

The control system and infrastructure in foreign trade should be improved. In particular, based on foreign experience, it is indispensable to reform the activities of customs, sanitary, quarantine, veterinary and other services that exercise control at customs posts.

In 2020, about 3 thousand standards are to be adopted, their number will be increased to 10 thousand, and the level of compliance with international standards – up to 40 percent. In Andijan, Termez and Kungrad districts, we envisage the creation of free trade zones and, through this, the development of cross-border trade.

Private trading companies should deal with determining the types of goods that are in demand, searching for markets and selling them. To do this, we should develop a package of laws governing their activities. This applies to trade in both domestic and foreign markets.

The Cabinet of Ministers is instructed to develop a concept for regulating foreign economic activity and elaborate appropriate acts to ensure the fulfillment of these tasks within a month.

In order to timely deliver our products to domestic and foreign markets, to reduce their costs, we need to develop the transport and logistics sector.

In the railway system, it is necessary to distinguish between the transportation of passengers and goods, operation and maintenance, that is, to split the natural monopoly part and separately develop those areas where the private sector can be attracted.

According to international experts, by improving infrastructure, ensuring tariff transparency and opening new routes, the transit potential of our country can be increased from the current 7 million tons to 16 million.

I want to draw your attention to another important issue. To boost population incomes, create additional jobs, augment production, we need to develop new markets. Today we have been passing many laws and taking decisions based on the requirements of a modern market economy. However, regrettably, many managers responsible for their implementation on the ground are still unable to get rid of the old methods of work, of an indifferent approach.

The open market dictates the need to improve product quality, reduce costs, attract new technologies, and promote market reforms. We must integrate into international production chains, meet the requirements of the labor market and go in line with economic integration. To be ready for dialogue and competition in the international market, industry leaders must work hard on themselves.

Given all these factors, we well understand the need to expand economic integration.

Today, 80 percent of our foreign trade cargo is transported through Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, 50 percent of finished goods exports, and for some items – over 80 percent, account for these countries.

Given this, and also in order to create favorable conditions for our citizens working in Russia and Kazakhstan, the prospects of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Eurasian Economic Union are currently being studied. To be sure, in this serious matter we will proceed first of all from the interests of our people and rely on their opinion.

Therefore, our deputies and senators, who are representatives of the people, should comprehensively discuss this issue in the houses of parliament and express their justified position with full responsibility.

The Cabinet of Ministers needs to complete the analysis and a comprehensive assessment of this issue and, building on its results, present the relevant conclusions and proposals to the chambers of the Oliy Majlis.

Along with this, we will continue our dialogue with the World Trade Organization and work to conclude a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union. We will also develop our participation in other international and regional economic organizations.

Fifth, it is essential to uninterruptedly provide industries with raw materials and to create an appropriate modern infrastructure.

In order to provide key sectors of the economy with crudes, including the chemical, oil and gas, energy, electrical industries, construction materials and the jewelry industry, we should first of all seriously intensify our exploration activities. This year, 2 trillion soums are allocated from the budget to study promising areas and bolster the prospecting of mineral reserves.

The State Committee for Geology is tasked, using these funds effectively, to explore 35 percent more new promising areas and deposits this year, and to increase this figure by another 40 percent next year.

Along with this, the State Committee for Geology together with the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade is instructed to form a package of ready projects for at least 20 fields to attract potential investors to their development. At the same time, the Geology Committee should put into practice an international system of accounting, classification and management of hydrocarbons and their reserves.

To ensure economic growth, it is extremely important to deliver a modern and efficient infrastructure.

Over the next three years, 9.8 trillion soums will be assigned for the construction of roads, 4.6 trillion soums for the construction of water supply networks, 18.2 trillion for the construction of electric networks, 1.2 trillion for gas supply. This funding is many times the figures in the last ten years. At the same time, the creation of modern infrastructure and modernization of existing systems requires 10 times more funds.

No matter how difficult it is, we will annually allocate funds as part of investment programs and certainly continue to work in this direction.

At the same time, the direction of half of the over-forecast revenues of the national and local budgets to the development of infrastructure should become one of the main tasks of the Ministry of Finance and hokims this year.

It is advisable, with the participation of the Legislative Chamber and the Audit Chamber, to organize a study of the targeted and effective use of these funds on site.

Sixth, one of the most critical tasks remains the further improvement of the business environment.

We take all necessary legal measures to become one of the top 50 countries in the Doing Business ranking of the World Bank. The government should organize the effective implementation of relevant activities.

According to the recently adopted Tax Code, a range of novelties have been introduced this year. In particular, the number of tax types has been reduced from 13 to 9. Lightweight tax payment mechanisms have been introduced with the option of deferment or installment plan.

For the first time, a procedure is being introduced for returning part of the value-added tax to entrepreneurs when selling products. Previously, this order was applied only when exporting it. Owing to this, 3.4 trillion soums will remain at the disposal of entrepreneurs, or 2.5 times more than last year.

From now on, if the entrepreneur does not return overpaid taxes within the prescribed period, funds from the budget will be paid to him based on the main rate of the Central Bank. I think the entrepreneurs who are in this room, and those who listen to me, sitting at the TV screens, understand the significance of this

innovation best of all.

Every employee of the tax service, entrepreneurs, taxpayers should understand and apply the norms of the new Tax Code, and thus it is obligatory to establish their regular training.

In order to fundamentally change the attitude of tax officials to their work and train qualified personnel, I propose to set up Fiscal Institute under the State Tax Committee and attract authoritative foreign experts for this endeavor.

Meanwhile, we will seriously change the system that often complicates entrepreneurial activity – the procedure for licensing and issuing permits. It must be openly acknowledged that among almost 280 licenses and permits there are those that exist only to account for activities, levy fees, or simply “not to weaken control”. This, in turn, draws fair complaints from entrepreneurs.

In this regard, the Ministry of Justice, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Business Ombudsman, before 1 March 2020, are instructed to radically review the grounds for issuing licenses and permits and make proposals for their reduction at least twice. A draft law on small and medium-sized businesses should be developed, criteria for small and medium-sized businesses, as well as incentive mechanisms for their entities, should be provided for in it.

This year, in each region, a new system for providing open and reliable data on land plots will be introduced for entrepreneurs. Thus, at any time and in any region an online map will be available with data on land plots, vacant buildings and structures, their cost and terms of acquisition.

As you know, the moratorium on checking the financial and economic activities of enterprises, introduced two years ago, has expired. But this does not mean that mass inspections can now resume, as it used to be the case before.

Liked by someone or not, we will not consent to this approach. May the heads of all regulatory bodies understand this well.

In the first quarter of 2020, regulatory authorities at all levels are required, based on best practices, to introduce a new modern system. On its basis, it is crucial to work individually with each enterprise and entrepreneur, to ensure that they conduct legitimate activities, and carry out inspections reasonably, only as a last resort, emergency one. Heads of regulatory bodies will personally report to the parliament on this issue quarterly.

The current bankruptcy procedures provide for the predominantly liquidation of enterprises and debt coverage from funds received from the sale of property. Therefore, over the past 3 years, reorganization has been applied to only 3 enterprises. This year we will completely abandon such a procedure and, on the basis of international best practices, we will introduce a completely new system for the rehabilitation of insolvent enterprises.

Both houses of the Oliy Majlis should establish effective parliamentary oversight of ensuring the rights of entrepreneurs.

We need to continue the policy of decriminalization of entrepreneurship offenses that do not pose a great public danger. In particular, criminal liability for such acts as false business, discrediting a competitor will be abolished. Also, persons who have committed a violation of customs law for the first time should be exempt from criminal liability, provided that established payments are made.

It is vital to stop the obsolete practice of bringing charges of establishing a criminal community and imposing harsh penalties on members of a business entity that is a legal entity. Considering that as a result of such a vicious practice, hundreds of entrepreneurs not only suffered financially, but also moral damage, it becomes clear how important this innovation will be.

The Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Business Ombudsman, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Ministry of Justice should develop an appropriate bill by April 1, 2020.

Seventh, agriculture, which is one of the most important areas for economic growth, employment and incomes of the population, must be developed on the basis of a strategic approach.

The existing growth rates in the sphere do not satisfy us at all. Therefore, until we widely introduce market mechanisms in agriculture, increase the material interestedness of farmers and dehkans, the expected breakthrough will not happen. In this regard, we will gradually shift to the system of purchasing cotton and grain based on market principles, abandoning the practice of state procurement of these products. If we do not take this path, then our farmers and dehkans will not be able to freely grow their crops and receive the expected income, and working methods of hokims will remain the same.

The activities of the State Support Fund for Agriculture will be improved, and the allocation of affordable loans to other sectors of agriculture will be established.

The Ministry of Agriculture should completely abandon such obsolete working methods as coordination of enterprises, allocation of resources, and setting targets. On the contrary, it should turn into a service organization, provide services to private agro-industrial enterprises in assessing the condition of the land, the optimal choice of varieties of crops and seeds, pest control, financial assistance, and the search for markets.

Along with supporting the farmers' movement, we will continue to implement measures for a phased transition to a cluster system for harvesting cotton and grain.

This work will also be continued in horticulture, rice cultivation, livestock, sericulture and other industries.

Measures should be taken to significantly increase production so that this year exports of fruits and vegetables reach \$ 2 billion and that this figure multiplies threefold and fourfold in the next 5-7 years.

The parliament should expedite the adoption of the new law on cooperation and clusters, which will become the legal basis for our reforms in this area.

This year we will channel 3 trillion soums to the development of horticulture, viticulture, seed production, livestock, agrologistics, the widespread introduction of water-saving technologies, research and training of qualified personnel for the field. In such areas as animal husbandry, karakul nurturing, fish farming, poultry cultivation, special attention will be paid to breeding and selection, the introduction of new mechanisms of state support.

In 2020, it is planned to introduce water-saving technologies on almost 44 thousand hectares, which is four times the figure last year. For these purposes, 300 billion soums of subsidies will be assigned from the national budget. At the same time, it is required to automate the processes of managing water facilities, water control and accounting.

These issues should be reflected in the Water Management Concept. The Cabinet of Ministers is requested to submit for approval a draft of this document by April 1 this year.

Eighth, we must turn the tourism industry into a strategic sector of the economy.

One of the most important tasks facing the government is to ensure growth in the inflow of tourists to our country up to 7.5 million people this year.

As you know, a number of prominent foreign publications have named Uzbekistan in the list of nations worth traveling in 2020. We need to effectively take advantage of this high attention and trust.

It requires accelerated development of pilgrimage and medical tourism, which have great potential.

In our country there are over 8,200 objects of cultural heritage, of which only 500 are included in tourist

routes.

The government should develop measures within three months to bring the number of facilities included in the pilgrimage and traditional tourism routes to 800.

Another important challenge is to accelerate the inclusion of new objects in Uzbekistan in UNESCO lists of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

This year, tourism infrastructure will be promoted vigorously, including the assignment of 200 billion soums of subsidies from the state budget for the construction of new modern hotels.

Ninth, it is crucial to secure comprehensive development in regions, deliver decent living conditions for the population, accelerate the process of urbanization.

As part of this work, 12 satellite cities of 7 major urban centers – Andijan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Karshi, Ferghana, Namangan and Nukus will be selected, and essential measures for their development will be elaborated.

In this respect, it must be said that there is a gap between those regions where the able-bodied population is concentrated and those where more jobs are created. The solution we see is the liberalization of internal migration.

To this end, the parliament and the government should study international experience in the field and come up with specific proposals by 1 April 2020 for reforming the migrant registration system.

Without the involvement of the private sector in housing, it is impossible to fully meet the housing needs of the population. Therefore, a new mortgage system is being introduced.

Thus, about 18 thousand apartment buildings in urban areas as well as 4 thousand houses in the countryside will be built by private construction companies. To ensure healthy competition among banks, the state will allocate almost 4 trillion soums through auction.

In order to provide social support to low-income citizens, about 1 trillion soums of subsidies will be assigned from the budget to cover the down payment for the purchase of housing and interest on mortgages for 16,000 families in need in cities.

Most of all, I would like every family in our country to have their own home, their own apartment. Thus we will ensure the exercise of citizens' rights to their own housing.

Dear participants of the meeting!

To radically improve the life of the people, we will accelerate large-scale social reforms that over the past three years have been carried out on the basis of the principle "Human interests first".

First. Improving the well-being of people and strengthening their social protection will remain among our most critical goals.

It is no secret that most of the inhabitants of the regions, especially villages, do not have sufficient sources of income. As in all countries, we also have low-income groups. According to various estimates, this indicator is 12-15 percent. It is about 4-5 million inhabitants of our country.

Many believe that this problem can be solved by paying benefits and material assistance or by increasing their size. However, this is a one-sided approach that does not fundamentally solve the problem.

Poverty reduction requires the implementation of a comprehensive economic and social policy – from stimulating entrepreneurial activity to mobilizing the abilities and potential of the population, creating new jobs.

In this regard, I propose to work out, together with the World Bank, the United Nations Development

Program and other international organizations, a Poverty Reduction Program. It is needed, on the basis of a deep analysis of international norms, to develop a new methodology, including the definition of poverty, the criteria and methods for assessing it.

In the meantime, an experiment launched in 22 rural districts of the Ferghana Valley to develop modern business and entrepreneurship skills among the population, which has been bearing positive results, should be extended to all other regions.

Priority should be given to implementing business initiatives that contribute to addressing local social problems, especially supporting entrepreneurship among youth and women. The population and entrepreneurs will be given wide access to microfinance services and financial resources, to public procurement. With these measures, we will raise people's interest in entrepreneurship, their confidence in the success of their own business and the desire to increase their income.

However, as you know, not everyone has entrepreneurial ability. Therefore, we must pay special attention to such people and provide them with decent work through professional retraining. 700 million dollars will be allocated for these purposes.

We must comprehensively support entrepreneurs who create jobs.

The Cabinet of Ministers is instructed to develop a draft law within two months on the basics of social entrepreneurship and measures to stimulate it. Along with this, the government should take measures to ensure the creation of 500 thousand new jobs in the framework of state programs this year.

I would like to emphasize that the principal criterion for assessing the activities of regional managers will be growth in the number of business entities and jobs in sectors, spheres, regions and districts.

During the year, wages, pensions, scholarships and allowances will increase ahead of inflation.

It is also necessary to introduce a new system for paying social benefits, including expanding coverage of low-income families, and ensuring targeted spending of budget funds. It is necessary to revise the criteria and move to a transparent system for assigning benefits, to give a critical assessment of the participation of mahallas in this work. In general, the new system should work so that citizens can apply for social benefits in one department, which shall prepare all the necessary documents and resolve the issue on the same day.

In addition, a system will be created whereby it is enough for citizens to present a passport to apply for a pension. For this, first of all, it is required to transfer the work of the state archive to digital technologies.

This year we should create a holistic and effective system of working with the senior population, especially single people, and bolster their social support. It is also critical to review the amount of social benefits allocated to them.

A separate program for the social adaptation of pupils of the Mehribonlik houses will be developed to include provision of them with jobs and later housing. It is very important for us that such children constantly feel the care and attention of the state and society.

It is crucial to review the payment of disability benefits for burial, in connection with the loss of the breadwinner, compensation for work-related injuries. A law on social insurance is needed.

The Cabinet of Ministers is entrusted with the task of developing a Concept for Social Protection of the Population within two months, providing for priority tasks in these areas.

Second. We will consistently continue our reforms to develop the healthcare system and improve the quality of medical care for the population.

We need to take practical measures to create decent working conditions and boost the income of medical

workers, to strengthen their standing in society.

1.5 trillion soums will be assigned to provide public medical institutions and the population with medicines and medical supplies, that is 1.3 times more than last year. It is planned to channel 1.1 trillion soums to the construction and repair of 281 medical institutions. At the same time, it is necessary to introduce a modern management system in 17 specialized scientific and practical medical centers.

Measures should be taken to further develop private healthcare through public-private partnerships, to bolster healthy competition in the field, primarily by attracting foreign investment in the development of specialized medical centers.

We need to improve the quality of hematological and virology care, to radically reform the medical care system for patients with intractable diseases of this category.

Funding should increase for the early detection of hematological and viral diseases, the training of qualified hematologists, virologists and immunologists, and the purchase of medicines and equipment.

It is necessary to introduce electronic medical records in specialized centers and their branches, including in medical institutions of Tashkent this year.

In order to fundamentally reform the healthcare financing system, it is essential to adopt a law on compulsory health insurance in 2020 and develop organizational measures for introducing a new system. As an experiment, this year it will begin to function in the Syrdarya region.

The urgent tasks are to control the circulation of medicines, suppress the circulation of counterfeit products, create a system for tracking real prices of drugs online.

Third. We must continue systemic work to support youth and women.

In 2020, a total of 100 billion soums of soft loans will be allocated for the implementation of business projects by 5.5 thousand women. The necessary resources will be directed to banks from the state budget. In addition, the state will compensate 1,576 women for a down payment on new housing.

Within the framework of the Five Initiatives program, we need to organize short-term training courses in order to gain a profession in female entrepreneurship centers.

Fundamental transformations in our country determine the relevance of the further development of youth policy. We must introduce common criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of work with youth, a national index for evaluating youth policy.

The Youth Union of Uzbekistan should develop the Concept "Youth of Uzbekistan 2025" and determine practical measures to foster spiritually and physically advanced younger generation.

No one should stand aside in a very critical work to ensure peace and harmony in our country, to deeply affirm in society the principle "Take care of your children, your home, your homeland like the apple of the eye!"

Of paramount importance is the development of the spiritual and moral world of our people, especially youth.

Therefore, the most crucial task for us is youth education on the basis of the idea "From national revival to national progress", in the spirit of patriotism, devotion to the Motherland.

As you know, we started implementing new initiatives in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, which now need to be distributed throughout the country. I urge the leaders of the regions and the local community to pay serious attention to solving this important issue.

Fourth. We should further disseminate the principles of healthy lifestyle among the population.

To this end, it is necessary to build new facilities of mass sports across the country, especially for young people. This year, projects for nearly 500 billion soums will be implemented providing for the construction of 269 football, volleyball, basketball and badminton courts, 178 halls for boxing, kurash, fitness and gymnastics, 32 tennis courts.

A transparent four-stage system for the selection of gifted athletes will be introduced on the chain "organization – district (town) – region – nation".

The government and the National Olympic Committee must create all conditions for a decent performance of our athletes at the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

Fifth. Attention should be focused on ecological issues and improving the environmental situation in the country.

We will continue large-scale work to mitigate the consequences of the Aral Sea tragedy, to expand forest plantations on the dry bottom of the sea, and create green belts around the cities of Nukus, Urgench and Khiva.

Vital tasks also include the improvement of the environmental control system in production facilities, revision of the environmental audit procedure and the intensification of private audit activities in this field.

The government is tasked with developing a program of comprehensive measures for 2020–2025 to prevent the negative impact of industrial development on the environment. By October 1 this year, a draft Environmental Code should be devised with the participation of leading international experts.

The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, hokimiyats of regions, districts and townships should ensure the elaboration and unconditional realization of programs in the field of environmental protection, waste management in each region and at each enterprise.

Sixth. It is necessary to pay special attention to cultural and art institutions and take measures to strengthen their material and technical base.

This year, from the budgetary funds, the buildings of 22 theaters and cultural institutions will be erected and reconstructed. Also, on the basis of public-private partnerships, 20 cultural centers, culture and leisure parks will be opened.

In the field of cinematography, it is necessary to ensure the development of the modern film industry, the construction of new cinemas, and the creation of highly artistic works.

This year, the cinema production system based on the state order will be improved. In this regard, it is necessary to develop a concept for the development of the cinema industry until 2030 and a law on cinematography.

This year we have to hold a high-level important event in the cultural life of the country – the second International Maqom Art Festival in Shahrissabz.

Also this year, we should widely celebrate the 145th anniversary of Mahmudkhuja Behbudi, an outstanding scientist and public figure who, at a difficult period of our history, boldly stood for freedom of the Motherland and enlightenment of the people.

In general, we need to deeply study the history of the Jadid movement, the legacy of our ancestral enlightenment. The more we study this spiritual heritage, the easier it will be for us to find answers to questions that concern us today. The more actively we promote it, the stronger our people, especially youth, will appreciate the current peaceful and free life.

Dear compatriots!

The creation of a comprehensively thought out and effective management system is a key condition for fulfilling our ambitious tasks.

At recent meetings with newly elected parliamentarians, we thoroughly discussed all issues related to the efficient organization of legislative and oversight activities of the Oliy Majlis.

I want to draw your attention to a number of urgent tasks in this area.

First, consolidation of the role and responsibility of local executive and representative bodies in public administration.

It is compulsory to create a new oversight system, which will determine how effectively the hokims use the broad powers granted to them over the past three years, and also assess the performance of the territorial structures of ministries and departments.

This raises a fair question: why is the Prime Minister, all members of government, hokims of the regions accountable to the national parliament, whereas the leaders of district and regional organizations are not accountable to local Kengashes? To fill this gap, a reporting system of hokims of districts on the execution of their programs to regional Kengashes will be introduced.

Now, hokims must inform the media and the public at least once a year about the fulfillment in their region of the target parameters and indicators defined in decrees, resolutions, concepts and strategies.

In order to increase the efficiency of work, I propose to introduce into the activities of local representative bodies an institution of Kengash inquiry.

Another important issue. Currently, the legislation provides for the implementation by hokimiyats of about 300 tasks and functions. Of these, 175, in fact, are not included in the core competence of hokims and duplicate the functions of other agencies, which cannot but affect the quality of work and performance discipline.

In this regard, it is recommended that the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, with the engagement of the Ministry of Justice, review the authorities of hokims in the first half of this year and prepare proposals for the transfer of unusual and duplicate functions to the relevant government agencies.

Second, today we expect from non-governmental non-profit organizations and other civil society institutions that they more actively draw the attention of state bodies to problems of concern to citizens, as well as their reasonable proposals.

To this end, we must establish social partnership with non-governmental non-profit organizations at the republican and regional levels, and increase the volume of grants and social orders. Social partnership is also necessary to expand ministries and departments. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the activities of the Oliy Majlis Public Fund to Support Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations and Other Civil Society Institutions.

The obligation to hold public consultations when making decisions on the most critical issues in the country's socio-economic life, which are of particular interest to the population, should be clearly fixed. Such decisions will only be made with public approval.

To strengthen public control, establish closer interaction between the state and society, I propose creating the Public Chamber of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In general, it is necessary to establish practical interaction among the parliament, government and civil society institutions in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and hold regular parliamentary and public hearings on this issue.

Dear deputies and senators!

The effectiveness of our reforms is largely determined by four important factors –the rule of law, effective anti-corruption, institutional capacity building and the formation of strong democratic institutions.

As you know, at the festive meeting in tribute to the Constitution Day, we examined in detail the priority tasks of securing the rule of law and improving the judicial sphere.

However, I would like to draw your attention to the following challenges.

First of all, one of the most important objectives is to fully ensure the independence of the court.

I want to repeat that cases of law violation still observed at the stage of the preliminary investigation can be eliminated only when real independence of the courts is secured.

The legislative measures we have taken are already yielding concrete results. Positive changes in this area were also recognized by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Mr. Diego Garcia-Sayan.

Over the past 3 years, acquittals have been issued against 1,989 people, of which 859 cases stand out in 2019 alone. Also, last year 3,081 people were released from the courtroom, unreasonable charges against 2,623 citizens were requalified or expelled.

The fact that our judges pass acquittals is, of course, our greatest achievement in the judicial sphere. As President, I will continue to fully support such principle and determination of justices.

Efforts are not confined to recognition of the restoration of human rights. It is time to clearly raise the question of the reasons for their violation, to answer for cases of pressure in the process of pre-trial proceedings.

It is needed to limit the legacy of the old system and the still ongoing practice of the prosecutor's office studying judicial decisions. From now on, the prosecutor will be able to request a court decision only upon receipt of a complaint in the case.

It is vital to review the powers of court chairpersons to evaluate the activities of judges and initiate disciplinary proceedings against them.

Government officials should make it clear to themselves that the issue of ensuring the independence of the courts will continue to be under the strict personal control of the President.

Everyone who has entered the courthouse must be completely confident that the principles of legality and justice are strictly observed in Uzbekistan. As the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant used to say, when justice disappears, there is nothing left that could add value to life. We must never forget this truth.

In Uzbekistan, judges are urged to be irreconcilable defenders of the law, a solid pillar of justice.

The Supreme Court, the High Judicial Council, and the Ministry of Justice are recommended to introduce a draft law within three months, providing for the implementation of these proposals in practice.

Second, the basic laws and codes relating to the judicial sphere were adopted about 20-25 years ago and ceased to meet modern requirements.

In this respect, it would be advisable for the parliament to adopt in the coming years the new Civil, Criminal, Criminal Procedure, Criminal Executive Codes and the Code of Administrative Liability. In this case, special attention should be paid to the implementation of advanced human rights standards in investigative and judicial practice.

When improving the legislation, what we should care most about is not the fact of passing new laws, but the benefits that the new bills bring to people and how they make their lives easier.

Third, it is essential to raise reforms in the field of early warning of offenses to a new level.

We are doing great work to improve the activities of the internal affairs bodies. But thus far they have not become an institution that is in fact respected by the people.

In their system there are no specific criteria for activities to protect public order, to fight crime, and provide public services. In this regard, I consider it important to emphasize once again that it is vital to continue the reforms and turn the internal affairs bodies into real defenders of citizens.

Over the next five years, the new composition of parliament, and the Senate in particular are expected to create all the necessary organizational and legal foundations and take practical measures.

We need to develop a system of advanced training and targeted training for heads of internal affairs bodies at all levels.

Fourth, unfortunately, corruption in various forms hinders the development of the country.

If we do not eradicate this vicious phenomenon, we will not be able to create a truly favorable business and investment climate, and no sphere of life in our society will develop.

It should be openly admitted that entrepreneurs still face corruption in such areas as the provision of land, cadastral, customs, banking services, licensing, and public procurement. This is evidenced by numerous appeals addressed to the President, messages in the press and social networks.

Unless all sectors of the population and the best specialists are involved in the fight against corruption, unless our whole society is, figuratively speaking, immunized with “integrity vaccine”, we will hardly be able to achieve our goals. From eliminating the consequences of corruption, we must move on to its early prevention.

Time itself requires the creation, in order to organize the systematic implementation of these tasks, a separate anti-corruption body accountable to the parliament and the President.

In this regard, the Presidential Administration, together with the committees of Oliy Majlis houses, is instructed to develop a corresponding presidential decree within three months.

Fifth, life requires us to take another important step in ensuring human rights and improving legislation on citizenship.

I deem it imperative to spearhead organizational and legal measures to solve, in accordance with the law, the problems of people who have been living in the country for many years, but who have not yet received the status of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, persons who arrived in the country before 1995 and have been living here ever since should automatically become citizens of Uzbekistan. Thus, the vitally important problem of almost 50 thousand compatriots will be solved.

The Cabinet of Ministers is instructed to consider this issue in conjunction with the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis and submit a corresponding bill before May 1 this year.

Dear participants of the meeting!

We will consistently continue to strengthen the atmosphere of interethnic harmony and religious tolerance in society. In connection with the International Friendship Day, which is celebrated on July 30, I propose to hold the first Friendship Week and the International Friendship Forum-Festival in our country.

The agenda should always include bringing to the general public the humanistic essence of Islam, proclaiming the values of peace, friendship and harmony, and affirming in our lives the noble idea “With enlightenment to counter ignorance”.

This year, international academic and practical conferences and other events on religious tolerance will be organized, along with those in tribute to the life and scientific legacy of the great Muhaddith scholar Imam Bukhari, the outstanding theologian Abu Mansur Moturidi and his successor, Abu Muin Nasafi.

We have a lot of work ahead to reconstruct the memorial complex of Imam Bukhari in Samarkand on the basis of a unique project. Meanwhile, we should organize high-level celebration of the 700th anniversary of the great thinker Bahouddin Naqshband.

In recent years, within the framework of the policy of humanism carried out in our country, important work has been carried out to return citizens who have ignorantly strayed from the right path to normal life. And this year we will continue to spearhead measures to solve social problems, including the social adaptation of people who had been involved in religious extremist activities but now sincerely repenting.

The rapidly changing difficult and alarming situation, conflicts in different regions of the world require us to always be vigilant, ready to defend our Motherland, the peaceful and harmonious life of our people and to adequately respond to all challenges and threats.

At a recent meeting of the Security Council under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, we identified priority tasks and practical measures in this direction. I am sure that the Armed Forces of our country will ensure the effective implementation of the tasks.

We will continue the large-scale work we have begun to reinforce our open, pragmatic and deeply thought-out foreign policy that meets our national interests. We will expand cooperation with all countries of the near and far abroad.

In this regard, I consider it necessary to draw your attention to the following priorities.

First. We should boost our relations of friendship, good neighborliness and strategic partnership with the countries of Central Asia in all areas.

Second. It is necessary to further the political, trade, economic, investment, transport, communication, cultural and humanitarian ties with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, the United States of America, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the states of the European Union and Asia.

Third. We will intensify multilateral cooperation within the framework of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States and other eminent international institutions.

In enhancing the international cooperation in addressing the Aral Sea problem, we have high hopes for the Human Security Multi-Partner Trust Fund for the Aral Sea Region set up under the auspices of the United Nations.

We intend to consistently advance the issue of Uzbekistan's membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council in the 2021-2023 period.

At the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, we proposed the development of an International Convention on Youth Rights. I suggest that the Samarkand Human Rights Forum forthcoming this year be devoted to youth rights and discussion of the draft of that convention there.

The adoption of a National Human Rights Strategy should also be accelerated.

Fourth. It is necessary to further increase the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The chairmanship of our country in the CIS in 2020 has historical significance for us. We are taking every opportunity to expand economic cooperation within the Commonwealth, raise the effectiveness of the decisions adopted by the organization and further strengthen humanitarian ties among the participating countries.

The development of relations within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will remain

one of the important directions of Uzbekistan's foreign policy.

In addition, this year, bilateral and multilateral summit meetings are expected to be held with the leaders of several CIS countries, Central Asia, the European Union and Asia. During those talks, the adoption of promising projects and programs that meet the interests of our people is envisaged.

I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the representatives of the diplomatic corps and international organizations accredited in our country who are making valuable contribution to the consolidation of cooperation with the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Dear compatriots, dear guests!

In 2020, the 75th anniversary of the Victory in World War II will be widely celebrated in the international scale.

We are rightfully proud of the enormous contribution that our courageous and gracious people made to this Great Victory. In total, more than 1.5 million sons and daughters of Uzbekistan fought for peace and freedom in this bloody war, every third of them did not return home, to their relatives and friends. Our people will never forget their feat, as well as the dedication of those who worked in the rear front.

Our duty is to honor war and labor veterans not only on holidays, but also on an ongoing basis, always taking care of them, their health and well-being. This year, attention to this issue will be intensified. In particular, we will create conditions so that veterans can strengthen their health in the best sanatoriums of the country.

Extensive work is being carried out to perpetuate the heroism and resilience of our people during the war through the art of cinema, theater, in fiction and journalistic works, as well as via the organization of scientific research, bringing to the public, especially youth, the enduring significance of the great deeds of our fathers and grandfathers. For example, a new Victory Park is being built in Tashkent's Almazar district.

We must organize comprehensive, highest-level, preparations for the celebration of the Day of Remembrance and Honors – the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory.

Dear compatriots!

Three years ago, we began the crucial work of deep modernization and renewal of our country at a new stage of national development. On this path, relying on the enormous intellectual potential, strengths and capabilities of our people, we have achieved the first, but very important and significant results. Now we have to consolidate this success, to decisively go forward, and achieve even higher milestones. Today, reforms in the country have become irreversible and are entering a decisive phase. The main criterion for all our activities is the result in practice. In this regard, the year 2020 will be for us all a year of testing for strength and increased responsibility. Yesterday's successes and results do not satisfy us anymore – today, Uzbekistan has changed dramatically, so has the mindset of the people.

Reforms that produce real results have been backed by support and approval of the people. And no one can stop such transformations, such a dynamic process.

Yet crucially, we must ensure that the results of reforms are felt in everyday life of every family, all of our compatriots.

To this end, leaders at all levels are required not to chase percentages and numbers, but aim their work at ensuring the vital interests of each person. Then our dear veterans, dear women, the younger generation, our entire multiethnic people will even more actively support the current course of democratic reforms.

I think it is from this point of view that we should approach the fulfillment of the tasks set in this Address.

The new composition of the Cabinet of Ministers together with regional leaders should ensure their

unconditional implementation and report quarterly to the Oliy Majlis.

The Presidential Administration and the Government are instructed to deeply work out the draft state program for 2020 with Oliy Majlis houses in 20 days and submit it for approval.

I would like to draw your attention to another important issue.

Over the past three years, legal foundations and ample opportunities have been created to ensure freedom of speech, the comprehensive development of the media, and the unhindered work of journalists and bloggers. We will continue to create the necessary conditions for the free activity of the representatives of the “fourth branch of power”, to objectively cover the course of dynamic reforms in progress in the country and to widely inform the domestic and foreign public about them.

I am willing to comprehensively support professional journalists at all time in the candid coverage of problems and shortcomings on the ground.

Dear compatriots!

The great Imam Bukhari quotes the wise words contained in one of the gracious hadiths: “Deeds are assessed with a view to intentions.”

Indeed, a business begun with pure, bright thoughts and aspirations will undoubtedly bear good fruit.

Today, together with our courageous and noble people, we set ourselves lofty goals and big tasks.

Each of us must once again realize: we are a people with a great history, great culture, who are not afraid of any trials and who overcome any difficulties on the way to a free and prosperous life with honor.

If we work together, united and conscientiously, we can secure the highest goals and open a new glorious page in the history of our people.

In realizing the priority goals and objectives defined in today’s Address, I rely primarily on our hardworking and generous people, our purposeful youth, on all compatriots who work selflessly for the prosperity of our native Uzbekistan.

Once again, I wish you all good health, inexhaustible strength and energy, every success and happiness in family.

Thanks for attention.