

# President's message: key messages and conclusions



On 29 December 2020, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev delivered a message to the Oliy Majlis. The head of state summed up the results of the work done, determined the priorities of domestic and foreign policy.

A distinctive feature of the current Address, first of all, is that it ended a really difficult year both for Uzbekistan and the whole world. Pandemic, natural and man-made disasters and, as a result, serious economic challenges tested the strength of the strategic course of development chosen by the President. Today, looking back, we can say with confidence that Uzbekistan not only passed the tests that fell to its lot last year, but also achieved a number of important victories.

Despite all the objective difficulties, the leader of our country remained true to his main principle: "the interests of the people are above all." Despite the closed borders, the state ensured the return home of more than 600 thousand compatriots. For this, all resources were mobilized, including diplomatic, sanitary and epidemiological, transport and logistics and others. True, this did not work out right away. Many of our citizens find themselves in a difficult situation far from home. But we didn't leave them. Almost 100 thousand citizens who were abroad were provided with the necessary assistance. In addition, support was provided both through our embassies and by volunteers who shared everything they could with their compatriots.

Our entrepreneurs, as well as ordinary citizens who experienced difficulties due to the pandemic, did not go unnoticed. They received tax breaks, deferred loan repayment and financial assistance totaling 66 trillion soums.

Within the framework of the national movement "Kindness and Support", in which a huge number of fellow citizens were involved, over 800 thousand low-income families received material assistance for more than 1 trillion soums.

It is clear that we did not solve all the problems of those in need, we could not satisfy all their needs: the Prosecutor General's Office revealed violations in the distribution of aid. Undoubtedly, one thing: the interests of the people have remained and remain the most important priority for the state.

It is noteworthy that the word "pandemic" and related issues were included in the top 3 most frequently mentioned in the Address.

Speaking about successes and achievements, I would like to note several remarkable factors.

First, objectively, the outbreak of coronavirus infection has been brought under control. Having overcome some confusion at the beginning, our healthcare system, under the personal supervision of the President, was able to mobilize. In a short time, about 30 thousand beds were organized. Over 200 thousand medical workers and 150 foreign specialists were involved. Today, the daily increase in patients does not exceed 70 people. This is one of the lowest rates in the world.

Secondly, the President said that last year alone we exported US\$1 billion worth of fruits and vegetables. In the best years in the past, we did not receive so much for the export of cotton fiber. Moreover, the yield of the same cotton increased by 10 percent.

All this was done by our private farms and clusters. Moreover, without providing special benefits and preferences from the state, without attracting students and state employees. On the contrary, jobs were created, new agricultural technologies and equipment came to the country, which today save water and energy, and help grow environmentally friendly products.

This is a very important indicator of the first results of the agrarian reform, which literally breaks down the cotton monoculture system that has been established for decades, devoid of any market logic and

common sense, which obliged thousands of people to perform unjustified duties in the fields.

Thirdly, the level of coverage of our youth with higher education has been brought to 25 percent. Four years ago this figure did not exceed 9. According to this indicator, the country was at the very end of the rating in the world, being practically on an equal footing with Afghanistan engulfed in civil war. For comparison: in Kazakhstan - about 50 percent, Kyrgyzstan - 43, Tajikistan - 30.

With the opening of new educational institutions and branches of leading foreign universities, the most important task of forming a demanded reserve of broad-spectrum specialists is being solved, for which an acute shortage has objectively arisen long ago.

Fourth, in 2020 alone, 719 citizens were acquitted. I want to remind you that four years ago there were none. This is not to say that our courts have become completely impartial.

But the statistics tell a lot. If earlier decisions in favor of entrepreneurs and citizens in proceedings against government agencies were sporadic, today statistics show the opposite. So, since 2017, administrative courts have satisfied about 70 percent of cases in favor of entrepreneurs and citizens.

Fifth, the results of internal reforms affected the recognition of Uzbekistan in the international arena. For the first time in history, he was elected a member of the UN Human Rights Council. The recent removal of our country from the list of countries of "special observation" in the field of religious freedom of the US State Department was a high assessment of our ongoing large-scale democratic reforms.

At the same time, in his Address, the President not only summed up the results of the work done. A large-scale program of further reforms was announced, a distinctive feature of which is its focus on the most specific, extremely accurate results.

In total, the head of state put forward more than 150 initiatives, tasks and proposals, dwelling on each area in detail, not disregarding a single detail.

The scale of financing the tasks stated in the Address is also significant. According to economists, it is planned to allocate about 25.6 trillion soums and 1.4 billion dollars to the initiatives, projects and tasks announced in the framework of the Address.

The key message of the President's speech - social development - remains the priority of the policy of the head of state. The issues of the well-being of the people, the all-round improvement of the quality of life of the people were a refrain throughout the speech.

In this regard, the linguistic analysis of experts from the Center for Economic Research and Reforms under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan is interesting, which showed the evolution of the country's leader's attention to the social sphere in his Messages. If words related to social topics accounted for 11 percent of the speech in 2017, then in 2020 - already 28.

Thus, this trend continued, the President remained true to the declared course. The largest and most significant block of the appeal is devoted specifically to social problems and economic development - about 60 percent. In total, the President announced over 70 initiatives aimed at increasing the effectiveness of social protection of the population, the well-being of citizens, and improving their quality of life.

Poverty reduction has become one of the central themes of the Message. The President told in detail how these issues will be resolved. Primarily due to employment. Here, one cannot fail to note the projects to create more than 1,000 vocational training centers in makhallas next year. All those who graduate from training courses and who want to start their own business will be able to receive subsidies of up to 7 million soums for the purchase of the necessary equipment.

In addition, 500 billion soums will be directed to the State Fund for the Promotion of Employment and the

Public Works Fund under the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan to ensure employment of the needy segments of the population.

In his speech, the President also gave a detailed answer to the most pressing questions that citizens have been asking in one way or another lately. And here one can feel the influence of direct meetings between the President and the common people, which have become an invariable practice during the visits of the head of state to the regions or participation in events. Communicating directly with Uzbek people, he gets an idea of all the "pain points" and existing shortcomings from the first hand.

Therefore, the Address outlines a wide range of targeted action measures: support for orphans and teachers, construction of schools and kindergartens, construction and reconstruction of theaters, museums, cultural and sports institutions, repair and construction of roads in cities and villages.

Such a timely response to the needs and requirements of ordinary people shows that the President hears the people of Uzbekistan, responds to their hopes and expectations.

In particular, the country's leader dwelled on issues of uninterrupted gas supply to the population. It was announced that 35 percent of the additional gas demand will be covered by reorientation of export resources to the domestic market, the rest - by imports.

In addition, from 2021, it is planned to abolish the monopoly on the supply of natural gas. Producers and importers will be able to sell gas on the exchange, and wholesale consumers will be entitled to purchase it. Private sector participation in the liquefied gas market will be expanded and customs duties on its imports will be abolished.

The topic of monopoly in the car market is touched upon - one of the most discussed in society. The development of competition in this industry is planned by creating a level playing field for enterprises and increasing the number of manufacturers in the automotive industry.

On the problem of corruption, the Ministry of Finance was instructed to establish the practice of publishing information on the revenues and expenditures of extra-budgetary funds of state bodies, purchases of organizations with state participation, as well as data on state subsidies and grants. Thus, the President reaffirmed his firm adherence to the policy of ensuring maximum transparency in the activities of state institutions, which will allow them to be placed under close public control.

It is also impossible not to note the emphasis in the Address on youth and education.

World experience shows that no breakthrough is possible without human participation. It is people who are the main advantage and capital of the country. The announcement of 2021 as the Year of Supporting Youth and Health Promotion fully reflects this logic.

Meeting, talking directly with young people, the head of state timely considered and felt her readiness to get involved in public affairs, to show "initiative from below", and not to wait for the implementation of reforms on a "top-down" principle.

That is, everything that many officials do not have.

Creative, free, educated youth can and should become a key driver of the reform process, a competitive advantage of Uzbekistan. All opportunities are provided for this, favorable conditions are created for education, creativity and participation of young people in the life of the country. So, up to 25 percent will be increased grant places in universities, including for girls from socially vulnerable families twice. This will further expand the coverage of higher education among young people.

It is also planned to increase the number of doctoral students in universities and research institutions to 4.5 thousand. An additional 240 billion soums will be allocated from the budget for this.

The number of young people sent to study in foreign universities through the "El-yurt Umidi" fund will also

increase this year, and five times at once.

Undoubtedly, the efforts and funds invested in this area are the best investments in the future. As Benjamin Franklin rightly pointed out, "investment in knowledge pays the best dividends."

Germany, which is the engine of economic growth throughout Europe, steadily increases spending on education and research from year to year. In turn, in China, the emphasis on in-depth study of exact sciences and informatics has played an important role in the formation of a new type of economy in the country - an innovative economy. Today, China is ranked 14th in the Global Innovation Index and is recognized as one of the leaders in this area.

The initiatives voiced by the President for the implementation of the Year of Support for Youth and Strengthening the Health of the Population will help support young people in mobilizing their own abilities, realizing their existing potential, and increase self-confidence.

In general, the Address demonstrated that a person, his interests and well-being remains at the head of the entire system of priorities of the President of Uzbekistan. This is the key goal and basis of all reforms of the head of state. It is in this that the uniqueness of the strategy of the leader of the republic for the modernization of the country and its broad support among the population are manifested.

**Source**