

Shavkat Mirziyoyev: “I devote my life to the Uzbek Nation”



In the speech of our President at a recent meeting with activists of Jizzakh region, one point caught the attention of most of the people. In it, the head of state said the following:

"If God gives me health and life, the days will come when we will not have poverty and unemployment. I have devoted seven years of my life to this, created a system for this, created laws, opened the world. I came to this position, so that my people would live well, so that their dreams would come true, so that their children would live in prosperity and be happy, so that their grandchildren would be born healthy, so that medicine would work, schools would work, roads would be smooth...".

These words touched people's hearts. Perhaps this is where this quote began to be promoted in the press and social media. Why? Because they were sincere and spoken from the heart.

I

A little time has passed and two extremely important news for the country have circulated in the pages of the media.

The first refers to the World Bank. It says: “Uzbekistan reduced poverty from 17 percent in 2021 to 11 percent in 2023, with the reduction being greater in rural areas (8 percent) than in urban areas (4 percentage points). About 1.6 million people were lifted out of poverty.”

For the second news, the Central Bank took responsibility: “At the end of 2023,” it says, “the total number of employed people in Uzbekistan increased by 312 thousand people, or 2.3 percent, compared to last year.

It is noted that starting from the second half of the year, labor market indicators continue to improve. In particular, by January of this year, the unemployment rate in the economy has significantly decreased and amounted to 6.8 percent. The main contribution to the increase in employment was made by the construction and trade sectors, while the number of those employed in agriculture decreased. In addition, the demand for labor, as measured by the number of vacancies in the labor market, increased by 14 percent.

We did not take these examples from an enthusiastic article by a writer or a journalist. The economic data cited are, by their status, official. Since the World Bank has recognized these indicators in its analysis, it means that we are on the right track: the work we are doing is paying off.

To be fair, it should be noted that among our people there are those who do not realize the changes taking place, as if they do not see them. I would say to such people: there are such concepts as justice and piety in this world, nobody has rejected them. And I would also say that Rome, the epicenter of human civilization, was not built in a day...

Of course, I'm not an economist. However, I live the life of the country, where the President pursues a humane policy, so I believe, as a citizen of my great Motherland, I have the right to express my personal opinion on many processes taking place in this country.

II

The history of the ancient world shows that unexpected changes sometimes completely change a person, his mental world, way of thinking, way of life and work. Such transformation forms in him/her love for the Motherland, a sense of involvement in progressive reforms, responsibility for his fate, future and, in fact, after all this, the greatest changes begin.

I will not be mistaken if I say that my words confirm the important processes taking place in the renewed Uzbekistan, which is currently acquiring a completely new image. Perhaps that is why these historical transformations are described by the world community as a “great era of revival”.

Indeed, in the first years of independence, and more precisely until 2016, we faced seemingly insurmountable, difficult, thorny obstacles. These were peaks related to our thinking, outlook, lifestyle, renewal of our dreams and goals, life principles that needed reformation.

It is important to note that in a short historical period, our people under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev have entered a new era, they are conquering the peaks of the New Uzbekistan with firm confidence, steadfastness, carefully thought-out plans for the near and long term and high consciousness.

III

Under the leadership of the President, the new Uzbekistan is turning into a state aimed at ensuring a free, comfortable and prosperous life for its people.

The effective results of this work can be seen in the recognition of authoritative state and political figures, experts and analysts. Most importantly, the democratic changes in Uzbekistan are being carried out not to please anyone, not for someone to praise us, not for the sake of getting into various ratings, but, on the contrary, for the sake of today's dignified life and happy future of our people, in the name of national interests.

Frankly speaking, the state and authorities have been far from people's life for many years. There is nothing to hide: in the past, if we mentioned a mayor or a minister, they seemed to us to be some higher beings. Because they were detached from the people, both ministries and local authorities were separated by an iron fence. It was impossible not only to approach a minister or a mayor, but even to see them.

Today, officials have come to the people. The President explains this process in a very popular language: to come down from the top to the bottom.....

Yes, it is! The government and its bodies must first of all serve the people. Only the state power, built on the basis of these principles, can rightfully become truly popular, democratic. The political-legal, socio-economic and spiritual-educational foundations of such a state and society will be strong and solid. For this reason, the improvement of people's life, timely and

effective solution for their problems, raising the level and quality of their life has been defined as the main goal of all reforms.

In our country the activity of state bodies is becoming more open and transparent. Senators and deputies, ministers and mayors, officials of all levels meet with citizens, solve their problems not on paper but in practice. State bodies are open both to the people as a whole and to each citizen; they actively communicate with them. The existence of forced labor, particularly child labor, unemployment, poverty, problems related to education, medicine, as well as housing problems of the population are openly recognized. They are being consistently eliminated. And, as a result, people have already felt that justice and piety are not only literary concepts from books, but real components of their lives.

As soon as the head of our state Shavkat Mirziyoyev assumed the duties of the President on September 8, 2016, the first thing he did was to establish the activity of people's reception centers. These structures removed the wall between the people and the government. People's pain began to reach the head of state directly. As a result, without any colors, the real life of people, their real problems were exposed. This allowed the head of state to develop specific measures to improve and develop society.

IV

Today we all see and feel that the economic system of our country is being completely restructured. No matter how hard it is, we have started to introduce market mechanisms in practice. As they say, first the economy, then politics. We could not talk about spirituality and enlightenment without putting the economy on its feet. We began our work in this direction by solving the problems of the population. As a result, many urgent issues have been solved today, such as cashing money from plastic cards through ATMs, differences in the exchange rates of national currency on the black market and in banks, buying foreign currency, obtaining citizenship, acquiring and registering housing and property in any region of Uzbekistan.

The reforms have had a positive impact on the interests of all segments of the population: entrepreneurs have gained freedom and new opportunities to develop their businesses, farmers have clustered farms, becoming real owners of their crops. Meanwhile, in the recent past, we could not make a single step without instructions from above. It came to the point that we grew cotton on the roofs of our houses, but this did not improve our lives.

Worst of all, even after our praised “Morning of Freedom” - independence, not to mention the Soviet system, we could not give up child and women's labor, even yesterday our defenseless children and helpless women were driven to the cotton fields in the heat of summer and cold days of autumn and spring....

In those years, millions of people were mobilized to collect cotton on a compulsory basis. Among them were not only children. In addition to them, workers in education and medicine, employees of all enterprises and organizations, and anyone who was able to pick cotton were called up for “strike work”. At that time, education, medicine and all other

strategically important spheres were pushed to the background, as cotton was the policy, the dominant value of the country's socio-economic ideology. Moreover, such a rotten system was in effect: if a collector failed to collect the norm set by his boss, he covered the “debt” with his own money....

Telling and putting on paper our past days, I came to the idea: do some of our people appreciate what we have today, who just yesterday, with their card in their hand, were looking for acquaintances from the bank or “enterprising benefactors” from higher offices to cash money, ready to give up to 30 percent of the money received for this selfless service as gratitude? And after all, this is only the beginning. Let us remember our valiant workers, representatives of science and production, who diligently put their knowledge and efforts into the prosperity and progress of their country, they also stayed in the fields until late fall in search of cotton stalks stuck in the beds. Even yesterday, these issues were the most painful problems of our society and reached the highest point of injustice.

It is true that today this miserable and meaningless way of life has changed. But it didn't happen by itself. Nor did it fall from the sky. Why are we so quick to forget and not appreciate it?!

Well, let's not divert from the main topic. Today, when it comes to economic reforms, we can confidently say that the development of tourism, reforming the tax system, liberalization of the currency market, elimination of problems related to cash, changes in the banking and financial sphere, international financial transactions are implemented on the basis of world standards. Most importantly, the currency market has been liberalized. After all, for a long time we restricted free currency conversion. Now enterprises can freely purchase foreign currency for import operations. Meanwhile, the old model of economy was completely based on the actual absence of conversion, and the conversion system was the most corrupt sphere. Figuratively speaking, this was the core of the old model.

Without irony, I would like to say that today few people remember these realities of the past and value all the positive transformations in our lives. Why? Because here the fundamental values inherent in our mentality are at work: “good things are quickly forgotten”. And it is precisely because of problems that many entrepreneurs were forced to stop their activities. As a result, thousands and thousands of jobs were lost.

Many of our people do not know and do not realize that the difficulties we are experiencing today are, of course, inevitable consequences of our previous mistakes and shortcomings. Unfortunately, there are few scientists and specialists who could interpret and expose them.

As someone far removed from economics, I see it this way: yes, there were rails and roads, but the problem was that this construction was committed to standing still. It was self-limiting. It was firmly enclosed and there was an urgent need for an outside influence to set it in motion. It was, if I may say so, a liberal economic policy. There is a popular saying among people: “Better late than never”. Indeed, better late than never. Today our economy is slowly picking up, the train has moved on. And the first picture that people have seen today has been

created, and everything possible is being done for our entrepreneurs. Their free business is under the close attention and personal control of the head of the state. The annual dialog of the President with entrepreneurs, which has become traditional, is an example of this.

I have witnessed and lived with these problems, I want to share my thoughts. For many years I managed a battery factory in Jizzakh. And in my activities I directly faced the problem with both cash and conversion. It was, to put it mildly, a real pain, a hell for an entrepreneur, a businessman. I will never forget, and when I remember, my heart hurts: from midnight to early morning, various meetings and conference calls were held, where big officials, important people argued to the point of hoarseness, shouted at each other, quarreled in order to somehow solve the issue of cash, and it even came to hand-to-hand. And the issue of conversion was even more troublesome and destructive for our economy. To increase workplaces at my factory and improve the quality of products, I personally found foreign partners, brought from abroad and installed modern equipment, but when it was time to close the loan for the equipment in foreign currency, we had to blush with shame in front of the foreign partners. As it was a big headache to convert the foreign currency. And if you miraculously managed to get foreign currency, be kind enough to share it with the state: give it exactly half. That was the order. This situation was not only for us, other enterprises, business people, production workers - all faced this “national tribute”. That is why production lagged behind, foreign investors stopped investing, and, as mentioned above, our railcars could not move.

Our President was well aware of this problem and had gone through this pain himself. That is why he personally took control of these issues. The first thing he did in the economic sphere was to liberalize the currency market, and the second most important innovation was monetary reform. Moreover, legal frameworks were created that opened the gates for free activity for businessmen and entrepreneurs, to protect them, and to support the economy. As a result of these efforts, many foreign investors have returned to Uzbekistan. According to a globally recognized economic law, in order to become a full-fledged participant in international trade relations, one must first meet a mandatory condition. This condition is free conversion. Only countries that are parties to international trade relations can participate in the international division of labor and enjoy the resulting benefits and privileges.

The country's population is increasing by 2% annually and is projected to reach 40 million by 2030. To maintain peace and stability in such a large country, to create decent conditions for people, the economy, management, education and medicine must be renewed, there must be growth and development in all spheres.

I can say with full responsibility that the strategy “Uzbekistan-2030” adopted by the head of state exactly directed to the solution of these problems. Due to consistent reforms, the volume of foreign investments in fixed assets and loans has increased 5 times compared to previous years and exceeded 16 billion dollars in 2017-2023.

A real class of entrepreneurs was formed, which became a real force in society, a driver of reforms. As a result, in recent years, the gross domestic product has increased from \$52.9

billion in 2018 to \$90.9 billion in 2023. The purchasing power of the population and the average monthly salary have increased almost 1.6 times compared to 2018 and now stands at 375.1 USD. Currently, based on the existing potential, we set even higher goals. By 2030, the economy is expected to more than double to 160 billion dollars, expanding GDP per capita from the current 2,496 to 4,000 dollars. As a result, Uzbekistan should become one of the countries with above-average income.

To achieve these goals, first of all, it is necessary to develop industry on the basis of advanced technologies. At the same time, labor productivity will double. For this purpose, major projects have long been launched jointly with foreign partners at a total cost of 115 billion dollars. In particular, strategic megaprojects will be launched in the coming years. Three copper-enrichment plants and a new copper smelter will start operating in Almalyk, a copper processing cluster in Ahangaran, large chemical-polymer clusters in Navoi, Kungrad and Karakul, enterprises for the production of finished products with high added value from phosphate rock in Tashkent and Navoi regions, and metallurgical complexes in Teginbulak and Galliaaral. As a result, by 2030, the production of copper, which is necessary to obtain a high-margin product, will increase by 3.5 times, gold - by 1.5 times, silver and uranium - by 3 times.

For the first time in Uzbekistan's history, we will begin production of aluminum, lithium, steel and graphite. These raw materials can be used to make hundreds of new products, including automobiles, electronics, green energy equipments, chemicals and polymers. That means creating 2.5 million high-paying jobs. As the President noted in his election program, projects of 4 prestigious foreign companies will be launched soon, real competition will appear in the automobile industry, and the annual production volume will be increased from the current 350,000 to 1 million units. 300,000 electric cars will be produced per year. Overall, the added value in the industry will increase from 20 to 45 billion US dollars.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that the future of industry and the economy lies in exports. In recent years, thousands of new enterprises have been opened in the leather and footwear, textile, food, electrical and pharmaceutical sectors. As a result, the volume of exports has increased 1.5 times and exceeded 20 billion US dollars. Given the high costs of entering foreign markets, the strategy is aimed at increasing the production of knowledge-intensive, highly profitable, export-oriented products.

V

A completely new and unique system for solving social problems has been created in our country. Importantly, the new version of the Constitution serves as a basic norm the principle of the "New Uzbekistan - a social State", aimed at further glorification of human dignity and provision of a prosperous life for present and future generations. In a social State, an important goal of sustainable development is to support the population in need of social protection, reduce poverty and unemployment, support youth and women's entrepreneurship, ensure the continuous development of education, health care and cultural spheres, ensure

effective social insurance, prevent social inequality and sharp social stratification of the population, and create decent living conditions for people.

Today, addressing the problem of poverty in Uzbekistan plays a special role in social policy. The active fight against it began in 2020, when the President officially recognized it for the first time. Databases have been formed to provide targeted support to the population in need. Since 2021, a mechanism has been introduced to record low-income families by including them in the information system "Unified Register of Social Protection". In 2022, deputy mayors, youth leaders and women's activists began working in 9,500 neighborhoods. With the assistance of deputy mayors, hundreds of thousands of people were employed. In 2017, 500,000 low-income families received social assistance, and today this figure is more than 2.5 million. The amount of allocated funds has increased sevenfold and reached 13 trillion uzbek soums per year.

As a result of the taken measures, as we mentioned at the beginning of the article, the poverty rate in our country in 2021-2023 decreased from 17% to 11%, and about 1.6 million citizens got out of poverty. The decisive factor in achieving such results is a systematic and far-sighted policy aimed at training the population in modern professions, creating suitable jobs for them, and providing comprehensive support for entrepreneurship.

Poverty reduction is a complex task that involves awakening the entrepreneurial spirit of the population, training for a profession and expanding the number of jobs. In this regard, the so-called "iron notebook", "women's notebook", and "youth notebook" should be emphasized. After we started working with socially vulnerable segments of the population on the basis of this system, many of our compatriots were not only able to improve the welfare of their families, but also created their own enterprises and became employers.

I remember like yesterday, three years ago we went to Jizzakh within the framework of the Women's Notebook program. In one of the neighborhoods of Sharaf-Rashidov district we entered the house of one low-income family. This woman, who lost her husband and was left alone with four children in a large and gloomy yard, still stands before my eyes, her eyes were full of helplessness and despair. We took this family into account and immediately provided the necessary assistance.

Recently, on a work trip, I looked into this neighborhood and stopped in front of the door of a familiar house. The walls are whitewashed, the gates are painted, the house is cozy. The yard itself had changed. A neat greenhouse had appeared in place of an empty plot, greenery was growing everywhere. I met the owner. In front of me stood a self-confident woman - a firm gait, lively eyes. When we offered her help, she kindly said: "Our state, our President saved me from the crisis. In those years, when you came to my house, I was lost, I could not explain my state of mind. Everything around me seemed hopeless, I could not find a way out. After all, to be left alone with four children... My relatives will help me once, twice, they all have their own worries. In such difficult days, Allah sent me you. Thanks to your help I built a greenhouse, cleaned up my homestead, raised cattle and started to get income from all this.

With the money I earned, I bought sewing machines and provided jobs for five young women in our neighborhood".

Frankly speaking, meeting this woman lifted my spirits. Since I saw for myself that the works started by the President are gradually bearing results, it is a living elixir for desperate people. Of course, I told only about one case, one family and one woman. Meanwhile, there are many women in the country who, due to such social projects, are firmly on their feet, have filled their lives with meaning and are doing good for society. When it comes to social protection, it is worth noting that the interests of pensioners are also well protected. Currently (as of January 1, 2023), about 12.4 percent of the population of Uzbekistan (4.5 million people) receive pensions and benefits. Recently, their number has been growing by 200,000-250,000 per year. As their ranks have expanded, it has become clear that some changes in the system are needed. One of the pressing problems of pensioners before 2017 was that they did not receive money in cash. On February 1 of that year, this issue was resolved: pensions and benefits began to be issued in any form - in cash or via plastic card.

Another positive shift in the pension system occurred in 2019. The maximum amount of salary for pension calculation was increased from 8 Minimum Wages Rate (MWR) to 10 MWR. As a result, for 531 thousand citizens, the amount of pensions increased. Moreover, on January 1 of the same year, working pensioners started receiving their pensions in full amount.

On January 1, 2023, the maximum salary for pension calculation was raised from 10 MRW to 12 MRW.

VI

Science, education and upbringing are the cornerstone of development and the force that makes a country powerful and a nation great. This is an undeniable truth. That is why in Uzbekistan a lot of efforts and resources are directed to the comprehensive development of the education system and the training of qualified personnel. In this process, a lot of work has been done to raise the status of teachers. As mentioned above, teachers and students have been exempted from any kind of forced labor, or rather free labor, such as cotton collection, field work, landscaping and construction work.

We all know very well that the unfair approach to the education system forced many male teachers to leave their jobs, humiliated the honor and dignity of teachers, and damaged their authority. As a result, how rude it may sound, school and children's education and upbringing were left in the hands of women teachers. Meanwhile, everyone who raises a child in a family knows how important it is for children to be raised by a father, a man, and we realize that the outcome of such a situation could have been sad if not addressed properly. So why did male teachers left school? The answer is simple: the money they earned from teaching children was not enough to live on. Think about it, a teacher is in school from morning to night, and his salary is not enough for his needs. Is there a greater humiliation for the person who is the head and breadwinner of the family! Many of us remember well not

only school teachers, but also university professors, figures of science, who quit their jobs and went to the "Bazaars" to feed their families.

Of course, I do not say all this with reproach, and I do not want to humiliate anyone. Those were that different times. And no one was protected from such a fate.

Today, if a person is honest and conscientious, he should recognize that the situation in education has improved. Due to the attention paid to the school, teachers are returning to their favorite profession. The state pays great attention to their material and moral support. In particular, in recent years, the monthly salary of school teachers has increased 2.5 times, and that of higher education faculty - 4 times. Today, hundreds of teachers teach in ordinary public schools and receive a salary of a thousand dollars.

Let us look at this situation on the example of the work of university professors. In 2016, they received a salary of about 2 million uzbek sums, and from December 1, 2023, this amount reached 11 million 148 thousand uzbek sums. In addition, teachers are paid an additional 60 percent of the budget for their academic degree. In general, no one can deny that the education sector today has become an arena of great reforms.

For example, taking the system of presidential schools, which has emerged in recent years. Such a system of primary education, corresponding to the world standards, has been created today in all regions. And the most encouraging thing is that their graduates receive grants to enter the most prestigious universities in the world. Thanks to these reforms, private education has been developed in our country, and now there are more than 383 private schools and more than 65 non-state higher education institutions.

The number of universities in our country has exceeded 210. Among them there are branches of prestigious universities of the world. The coverage of higher education has increased from 9% to 42%.

I involuntarily recall sad episodes that took place in those times in the education system, today we have almost forgotten about them. Only 8 years ago, with the arrival of spring, our capital and cities with universities were filled with parents of applicants with money in bags. The goal was to get a child to study. Nobody believed in such concepts as knowledge, justice, luck. Everyone knew that nothing is solved without money. The children themselves knew that. There were reasons for this. Firstly, the sphere of education was the most corrupt, and secondly, the number of available universities was not proportional to the number of graduates. Today, education is available to many people. An applicant can apply simultaneously to several universities and become a student of one of them. Who remembers these changes today?!

It is appropriate to say here that today the issues of building modern schools and reconstructing old ones are also under special control of the President. Now, even in the most remote villages, there are no schools left that were once built of clay and stones, with ceilings blackened by dust and smoke.

Let's face it. After all, until recently, our children studied in buildings that today people are afraid to even enter. And who can take the liberty to say that all this came

easily, without much labor! Unfortunately, very often we do not pay much attention to such things, we quickly forget everything good that was done, people have a short memory.

Another important detail of upbringing is the system of preschool education. Frankly speaking, in Soviet times this system was not at such a high level and was far from perfect, but there was a certain order here. Even in kishlaks there were such concepts as nurseries and kindergartens. Women gave their children there and had the opportunity to work in government jobs or do other things. This process was interrupted during the years of independence. Such institutions in towns and villages began to close down, and their buildings and land plots were sold off.

And the most interesting thing is that a whole generation, especially in rural areas, seems to have forgotten what kindergarten is. This concept has even disappeared from our everyday vocabulary. But even here we did not refrain from making false promises, claiming without remorse that "we must create conditions for rural women, in the modern world they must work, take care of themselves and have equal conditions with urban women. And it did not occur to anyone that a rural woman has three or four children to leave behind if she goes to work. Moreover, television programs emotionally began to give lessons in ethics and aesthetics, to hammer into the head that a rural woman should also take care of herself, dress well, it is, you see, an important factor in the strength of the family. Frankly speaking, it is so, there is no mistake: every woman deserves to be beautiful and happy. However, this requires appropriate conditions, which no one could provide them with.

After 2016, these problems started to be solved without too much hustle and bustle, endless socio-economic commentary, explanations and discussions. In my opinion, they were more oriented towards solving the problem as soon as possible, rather than for the sake of PR and enthusiastic applause. Thanks to these efforts, the number of preschool facilities increased 6 times in the following years. Private sector participation in the sector increased significantly. Hundreds of family kindergartens were organized in remote and hard-to-reach areas. As a result, the coverage rate of children in primary educational institutions reached 74.3 percent. Measures are now being taken to raise this figure to 80 percent by 2025.

Most importantly, according to the "Education 2030" concept adopted in Uzbekistan, reforms continue consistently.

However, there is one point that surprises me, there are many changes in the education system, the authority of teachers, professors and academicians is growing, so why our intellectuals do not talk about them, or their conversations do not go beyond a narrow circle! After all, who, if not them, better to know and understand the situation that was 7-8 years ago?

In our country, special attention is paid to providing qualified health care to the nation. In evidence of this, the funds allocated from the budget for health care increased from 7.3 trillion UZS to 24.7 trillion UZS, the average monthly salary of doctors - from 1131.2 to 3282.7 thousand UZS, the salary of nurses - from 692.1 to 2008.6 thousand UZS. Funds allocated from the budget for medicines and medical devices increased from 0.4 to 1.8 trillion UZS, the number of universities in the medical sphere - from 7 to 9, private medical organizations - from 4000 to 7010.

It is known that prevention of a disease is more effective and useful both for the family and the state than its treatment. Therefore, the development of preventive medicine in the country has been prioritized. First of all, primary health care and the system of emergency and urgent medical care are being reformed. The health care system has been brought closer to the population through the establishment of a "khonadonbai" patronage service in each neighborhoods. In 2022 alone, 136 family medicine centers and family clinics and more than 1,000 neighborhoods health centers have been established in remote areas. The amount of funds for 70 types of medicines distributed free of charge to the population by family doctors has increased threefold compared to previous years. As a result of the creation of day hospitals in family polyclinics, 740,000 people have been able to receive treatment directly at their place of residence, without having to turn to hospitals. The scope of qualified and technologically advanced medical services is expanding. First of all, more than 100 branches of 25 specialized medical centers have opened in all regions of the republic. As a result, surgical interventions and 200 types of diagnostics, which used to be performed only in the capital, are now performed by regional clinics as well. Over 130 types of surgical interventions have been organized for the first time in regional clinics, 60 types - in district clinics. The monthly salary of medical workers has increased 3.1 times, they are no longer involved in forced labor.

Most importantly, due to the measures taken, the average life expectancy of the population has exceeded 74.7 years. The task is set to bring this indicator to 78 years in the future.

From this year it is planned to take necessary measures for treatment of 10 most common diseases at the level of primary health care, to provide the population with a guaranteed medical package of 6 medical services on a free basis, to continue the work on free distribution of 7 types of vitamins, iodine and folic acid to women of child-bearing age, pregnant women and children.

VIII

Creation and destruction is an inherent human struggle, and our ancestors, from ancient times, courageously walking along the paths of history, united by a single idea, have accumulated a great experience in this regard. Do you know what our nation has not experienced, how many great conquerors over the centuries could not defeat it! Thanks

to wise rulers, sometimes our people lived in peace, the country prospered, and sometimes our dreams and goals were destroyed in the whirlwind of oppression and ignorance.

The subsequent life of the peoples of Central Asian countries located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road is written in the pages of history as a new era of good-neighborhood, mutual trust and cooperation thanks to the initiatives of Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Today, we should be rightly proud of the fact that we are not only observers but also active participants of such a historical period.

I have expressed my thoughts on this topic in many of my articles and will not tire of supporting the far-sighted policy of our President. These thoughts, historical facts worthy of becoming a leitmotif and clearly demonstrating the political determination of Shavkat Mirziyoyev can be formulated as follows: good-neighborly relations have been valuable for our ancestors since ancient times. It is appropriate to recall wise sayings passed down from generation to generation: "If your neighbor is calm, you are calm", "A close neighbor is better than a distant relative".

However, these concepts, established and confirmed by history, have not become a principle of our life. The countries of the region, having a common language, religion and culture, are becoming strangers against the background of political ideologies and intrigues, and the once uniting language of mutual trust, friendship and neighborhood is turning into a sharp language of diplomatic sarcasm and backbiting. Moreover, in the relations between the countries of the region, this mood of people has formed the so-called "language of enmity". Let's leave aside other countries. What was the situation in our country eight years ago with our close neighbors, border and customs inspection? We can't even talk about trade and cultural ties, there were none.

It was a hard test for Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who made it a priority of his foreign and domestic policy to break iron fences, to make Uzbekistan an open country, especially to bring warmth to the frozen relations with the countries of the region. Meanwhile, for us, those past days, like a film with a sharp plot, scrolling before our eyes, having a favorable ending, acquire a special historical value and awaken in us special feelings of belonging.

After all, it is no secret that in all corners of our country the traditions of matchmaking, kinship and brotherhood are closely intertwined by the unbreakable bond between our peoples. But we remember and cannot deny that such values were lost during the cold period of relations. I remember in those times there was an order to completely remove the railroad that ran through the territory of Tajikistan from Tashkent to the Fergana Valley and plant trees in its place. The order was carried out. I don't have to give the reason, everyone knows it: cold relations. Meanwhile, no one thought then about how much the economy suffered, how many people felt pain because of this political decision.

Speaking of people's fates. When I was writing these lines, I felt pain and bitterness with all my heart for thousands of people who died as a result of explosions in the mountainous border areas, which were mined after the civil war in the neighboring country. It was because of cold relations that the area, called the field of hell, was not

demined, causing fear and anxiety for many years. This stubborn determination in politics has damaged not only economic and political but also social relations between our people.

For example, families living in border villages of the Fergana Valley and oasis regions had to cross several borders and travel hundreds of kilometers to go to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan for a wedding or a funeral. After all, they lived so close that they heard each other's voices, used water from the same stream, it was enough for them to pass through one or two neighborhoods or villages to meet and hug each other.

We have seen a lot of grief and suffering of people, who due to difficulties in crossing the border for many years could not see their relatives, share their joys and sorrows, see someone off on their last journey. When you see how for many years parents lived waiting to see their children, worried about them, you feel with all your soul that there is no greater suffering than helplessness and powerlessness. When the borders opened, people were finally able to see their relatives whom they longed for, whom they loved. Finally their pain got subsided, the roads to their relatives' weddings and travels were opened to them.

The head of our state raised a problem, the solution of which requires great political will. He began to address issues that can be settled only by joint efforts, such as borders, water bodies, use of transboundary rivers.

It is relevant to note that our region, located in a geopolitically important zone, has always been in the center of interests of world powers, and most of them assessed the rapprochement of states as a negative factor for their influence on these countries. The peoples of Turkestan, divided at the beginning of the last century by the Soviet power on ethnic principles, even after gaining independence could not get out of the quagmire of separatism, discord and nationalism. It is for this reason that the famous American politician and statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski was probably right when he introduced the concept of "Euroasian Balkans" into geopolitical terminology.

-....The word "Balkans" in Europe, he says, "immediately brings to mind scenes of ethnic conflicts, and one recalls scandals between major countries in the region. Eurasia also has its Balkans, but the Eurasian Balkans are much larger, more densely populated and more ethnically diverse. They are located over a very large area that forms the central zone of global instability and includes parts of Southeast Europe, Central Asia, parts of South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East.

In this composition, the scientist includes nine countries, and five of them are countries in our region. Of course, we understand what Brzezinski meant. As he rightly suggests, over the years of independence, our region has seen several ethnic conflicts over the division of territory and water resources. And, unfortunately, most of them took the form of bloody clashes. However, twenty-five years after independence, both social and political life here has changed. To Brzezinski, we can say that the political climate brought to the region by Shavkat Mirziyoyev may bring changes in his views. I would like to give one impressive example. Last year, in an interview with the Kabar Agency, Kyrgyz

President Sadyr Zhaparov firmly expressed his position against some destructive forces misinterpreting and misleading people on the issue of the Kampyrabad reservoir and said:

...Now let me come to the most important question. Does it matter to us in what way the Uzbek side receives water that already comes to Uzbekistan? It does not matter whether it is through pipelines, rivers or air. What is important is that every action must be mutually agreed upon.

From now on, Kyrgyz-Uzbek friendship will be strong. No one can break our bonds of friendship except Allah.

That is why we should ask Allah that we always live in peace.

All kinds of experts, analysts and politicians who closely follow political and economic relations between neighboring countries know very well that we had almost 25-year conflict with Kyrgyzstan on water and border issues, and it remained unresolved for a long time. Today all these problems have been solved. And the most encouraging thing is that politics has changed and our views have found harmony.

To confirm my thought about the growing trend of rapprochement of the countries of the region, I would like to cite one more small quotation. It belongs to the head of Kazakhstan Kasym-Jomart Tokayev. On May 16, 2024, at the first meeting of secretaries of security councils of Central Asian states, which was held in his country, he said:

We are pleased to note that the situation has changed dramatically in the direction of strengthening cooperation and mutual trust.

I can say with full responsibility: literally 10 years ago there was no such situation in the Central Asian region.

Today, not only heads of state, heads of government, secretaries of security councils, heads of law enforcement agencies, but also individuals heading economic agencies are in close cooperation with each other. This is a very good indicator that the situation in the Central Asian region is moving towards sustainable development.

Indeed, in recent years, not only our peoples and political elite, but also external observers - politicians and analysts of all kinds - have noticed and recognized the changes in the region. Thus, Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, director of the Center for Management and Markets at the University of Pittsburgh, USA, last year in an interview with foreign media said: "...the time has come to see Central Asia for what it is. This is no longer the post-Soviet space. This is Eurasia. I think Central Asia has been seen through the prism of the post-Soviet space, it has not been seen as the heart of the Eurasian supercontinent...". Given that she is an expert who has been studying Central Asia for a long time, it is clear that her assertion is somewhat valid and weighty. But how did these great changes, which are recognized both by the leaders of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and by the American scholar, come about? Although it is often not openly discussed, the whole world and all the people of the region understand perfectly well who is behind these actions. These processes are connected with the personality and political will of Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

When it comes to our people, who have been living next door to each other for thousands of years, it is necessary to openly acknowledge one point: the wise policy of our head of state has created warm relations between neighboring countries, which are reflected in the life and mood of people. For example, when our country's soccer players won a license to the Paris Olympics, social networks were filled with praise and good wishes for them. I was very pleased that thousands of Kazakhs, Tajiks, Turkmens and Kyrgyz were among the well-wishers. Their sincerity showed that relations between our countries and people are strengthening in the true sense.

Indeed, sincerity breeds sincerity. As our people, who ten years ago cast contemptuous glances at each other, today rejoice in the victory of neighbor and brother, this can be called, in the language of sociologists, a historical reform in an unstable ethnic context. In fact, in the not too distant past, discrimination, dishonor and cynicism were, in a sense, our way of life...

IX

Of course, it is impossible to fully cover the foreign, domestic and regional policies of the head of state in one article. Therefore, I briefly touched upon some reforms and historical updates. And I realized that this process allows us to clearly present a vivid image of the Leader of our Nation - a political portrait.

We started the article with a quote of our President. Of course, there is a reason for it. At that meeting, the Head of State, in my opinion, opened his heart to people. He shared his dream with people. These sincere words, coming from the depths of his soul, sounded like a report of the President to the nation.

This fiery speech was echoed in our hearts. I believe that the determination of the Leader of the Nation, who spared no life for the people, and his undying love for the Motherland and the nation will serve as a source of inspiration for all of us on the path of creating a bright future for the New Uzbekistan.

**Qudratilla Rafikov,
Political scientist**

