

# Cooperation between Uzbekistan and South Korea is developing in all areas

By Vitaliy Fen

Ambassador Extraordinary of Uzbekistan to the Republic of Korea

It is a high privilege for me to address today the esteemed readers of *The Korea Herald* on the occasions of the 30th anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence and 29th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea.

After gaining independence, Uzbekistan took a worthy place in the world community. Over the years, a great creative work has been carried out. Human honor and dignity are exalted, the well-being of people is ensured, appearance of our cities and villages has radically changed.

Today, Uzbekistan is demonstrating a steady pace of development in all spheres under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Effective multilateral foreign policy serves as an important factor of increasing the export potential and expanding economic opportunities of Uzbekistan.

The foundation of bilateral relations between our states was laid on Dec. 30, 1991, when the Republic of Korea among the first countries recognized Uzbekistan's independence. Subsequently, the diplomatic relations were established on Jan. 29, 1992.

The Republic of Korea is one of Uzbekistan's most reliable and time-tested strategic partners, as well as leading and largest investors in our Republic.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries, 16 meetings have been held at the level of heads of state.

I especially want to note that the historic State visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the Republic of Korea, which was held on Nov. 22-24, 2017, determined new prospects for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Within the framework of the visit, more than 60 documents worth more than \$10 billion were signed in trade and economic, investment, financial, technical and other spheres. Of these, \$4.5 billion is direct Korean investment.

Dozens of major projects have been implemented and are being implemented in various sectors of the economy with investments from leading South Korean companies. They include Surgil gas processing complex, textile factories in Fergana and Bukhara, Hyundai automobile manufacturing plant in Namangan, the largest in the region, and many other projects.

In further advancing and deepening bilateral cooperation, regular dialogue between the leaders of the two countries that has become



▲ Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev receives a delegation of the National Assembly of South Korea in Tashkent in April.

◀ Uzbek Ambassador to Korea Vitaliy Fen

▶ Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev during his visit to Seoul in November 2017



one of the hallmarks of Uzbek-Korean bilateral relations, played an important role.

At the invitation of President Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae-In paid state visit to our country on April 18-21, 2019. The fruitful negotiations of the heads of state was followed by the signing ceremony of bilateral documents took place.

Presidents Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Moon Jae-In signed a Joint Declaration on Special Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea.

On 28 January, the President Mirziyoyev held a meeting with the President Moon via videoconference.

The agreement on conducting the current summit was reached during the latest contacts of the two leaders in October last year.

The agenda of today's negotiations included the acute issues of development and strengthening Uzbekistan — Korea centuries-long friendship and special strategic partnership.

Opening up the event and warmly greeting one another, the heads of states have underscored that this meeting is the first summit for both sides this new year. This once

again testifies about the highest level of bilateral cooperation.

As it was emphasized, despite the consequences of pandemics, the multifaceted relationship between Uzbekistan and Korea continued to dynamically develop. Last year the leaders of the countries have held two telephone conversations and jointly participated in the International Forum for Northern Economic Cooperation.

On May 30, President Mirziyoyev, at the invitation of President Moon Jae-In, took part in the Second International Summit "Partnership for Green Growth and Global Goals 2030" (P4G), in Seoul, via videoconference.

The agenda of the two-day forum includes issues of overcoming the consequences of climate change, green recovery and ensuring carbon neutrality, as well as the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the provisions of the Paris Climate Agreement.

On April 6, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev received a delegation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea led by the Speaker Park Byeong-seug.

The high-profile Korean delegation included, alongside the speaker, six deputies — members

of parliamentary committees covering priority areas: public administration, financial policy, industry, trade, energy, transport, agriculture, ecology, health care, labor relations, culture, sports and tourism.

The topical issues of the bilateral and regional agenda were considered at the conversation. A special emphasis was laid on the important role of parliaments in strengthening the relations of friendship and special strategic partnerships between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea.

The President noted with great satisfaction the ongoing active exchanges and the dynamic development of the Uzbek-Korean full-scale interactions. At the beginning of this year, the online summit of the leaders of the two countries was successfully held.

Park Byeong-seug, having expressed deep gratitude for a warm welcome, conveyed sincere greetings and best wishes on behalf of the President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae-in to the leader of Uzbekistan.

It was noted at the meeting that in the conditions of the challenging global economic situation, the volume of mutual trade is being

maintained. The new investment projects portfolio for amount over \$3 billion has been prepared with the participation of high-profile Korean companies and banks. In general, the volume of investments from the Republic of Korea exceeded \$7 billion.

A gratitude was also expressed for a profound practical assistance of Korean partners in combating the coronavirus pandemic in Uzbekistan.

Further strengthening of cooperation between the two countries is facilitated by consistently developing cultural and humanitarian ties, especially in the areas of education, medicine, tourism and sports.

All-in-all, over the past 29 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations Tashkent and Seoul have forged a genuine strategic partnership and currently are closely cooperating with each other in further advancing multifaceted cooperation in various fields and strengthening mutually beneficial bilateral relations that serve the interest of the two countries and their peoples.

In conclusion, taking this opportunity, I would like to wish to the esteemed readers of this reputed magazine every success in all their endeavors, longevity and well-being.

## Development of the economy of Uzbekistan in the first half of 2021

The following article was contributed by the Embassy of Uzbekistan. — Ed.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, the economy of Uzbekistan has reached record growth rates. According to the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the gross domestic product for the first six months of this year increased by 6.2 percent. For comparison: Over the same period last year, due to the pandemic and lockdowns, the economy grew by only 1.1 percent, and in the first three months of 2021 — 3 percent.

In Uzbekistan, inflation in the consumer sector continues to slow, despite serious increases in the prices for certain commodities such as carrots and vegetable oil. In the first six months of the year, prices increased by 4.4 percent while in 2020 over the same period — by 4.6 percent. The largest increase in prices is noted for food products — by 5.7 percent (in the first half of 2020 — 6.2 percent). The rise in prices for nonfood products is also slowing down — 3 percent against 3.6 percent in January-June 2020.

The inflow of investment in the first quarter of this year has shown positive dynamics. Investment in fixed assets rose by 5.9 percent against a decline of almost 10 percent in the same period last year. Investments from the budget decreased by 8.5 percent. Investments and loans under the guarantee of the government decreased by more than 36 percent, and their share in the total volume of investments fell to 8.9 percent. The inflow of investments from noncentralized sources has noticeably increased — by 14.9 percent.

All sectors of the economy have shown positive movements, with the main drivers being the industrial and service sector.

The industrial sector in January-June demonstrated high growth rates — 8.5 percent against a decline of 0.3 percent over the same period last year. The mining industry grew by 7.5 percent (a decline of 18 percent in January-June 2020), the manufacturing industry by 8.6 percent (4.9 percent), and electricity, gas and air conditioning by 12.1 percent (8.4 percent).

The service sector, such as tourism, catering and accommodation, saw even more impressive growth — an increase of 18.3 percent in the first half of the year versus an increase of 2.6 percent in January-June 2020. The transport sector is actively recovering after last year's decline: Freight turnover increased by 14.1 percent, passenger turnover by 4.1 percent. Retail trade in the period under review increased by 9 percent.

A slowdown relative to last year is noted in agriculture, to 1.8 percent versus 2.8 percent, which is due to difficult weather conditions this year and a lack of water. The growth rates of the construction sector also slowed down to 0.1 percent against 7.1 percent in the first half of 2020.

Foreign trade also managed to overcome the recession. In the first half of this year, sales grew 13.6 percent to \$18 billion. In the same period last year, there was a significant decline of 18 percent. During the period under review, exports grew by 12 percent to \$7.1 billion and imports by 14.4 percent to \$11 billion. In the second quarter, Uzbekistan sold gold abroad against the background of positive price conditions on the world market. However, it should be noted that in the first six months the volume of exports without gold increased by 36.4 percent and reached \$5.7 billion.

Among exports, the volume of food supplies to foreign countries increased by 6.3 percent, chemicals by 18.6 percent, industrial products by 74.4 percent (mainly textiles, nonferrous metals), machinery and transport equipment doubled.

At the same time, imports of food products increased by 46.2 percent, industrial products by 29.1 percent (mainly metallurgical products), chemical products by 17 percent.

Thus, the results of the first half of the year show the economy of Uzbekistan is actively overcoming the consequences of the crisis and reaching pre-pandemic levels.

## Civil society reforms in Uzbekistan

By Eldor Tulyakov

Executive director of Development Strategy Center of Uzbekistan

Upon Shavkat Mirziyoyev's election as president of Uzbekistan in 2016, the role of a robust civil society became the cornerstone of development for a new period in the country's history. Radical reforms have been embraced in all aspects of our society's political and social life — with nongovernmental organizations and civil society institutions the locus for reimagining the state's role in our lives.

With this purpose in mind, President Mirziyoyev presented a flagship program known as the Strategy of Actions where he outlines the five priority areas for the country's midterm development: enhancing the role played by civil society institutions in public life, mainly through the media; improving the activities and capacity of NGOs; developing and introducing effective mechanisms for public engagement in all levels of governance; strengthening the institutional framework, primarily through legal structures, to ensure the effective operation of civil society institutions and support of those institutions; and fostering their initiative in exercising public engagement over the activities of state bodies.

Public engagement in the con-

text of the changes underway in Uzbekistan means a constant discourse between state institutions and the people they are obligated to serve. Only then do we make decisions on critical sociopolitical issues.

We provide ample opportunities for the active participation of nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations in the social protection of the population. Through these means, we will strengthen public health, ameliorate environmental concerns, provide a balanced education for our youth and increase citizens' medical and legal knowledge, among many other reforms. As a result, we have seen a considerable increase in nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations and other civil institutions' activities following in the words of the president, "It is not the people (who) should serve the state, but the state must serve the people."

In particular, because we submit draft laws, decrees, resolutions and other normative legal acts for public discussion and examination before adoption, we often avoid the emergence of problems, whether intentional or not, at an early stage in development. The media and social media play an essential role in fostering public criticism of government agencies and officials.

In turn, we created the Virtual and People's Receptions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan to ensure human rights and interests, to establish a dia-

logue with people and to carefully study and resolve problems. We can monitor local issues through objective criteria and assess their activities, holding responsible state institutions and officials accountable to society.

Today, people's receptions in all regions, cities and districts have switched to an active system of identifying and solving problems through door-to-door visits to families. Through this grassroots effort, we ensure transparency of direct dialogue with the population, identifying solutions to issues at the local level while protecting individuals and legal entities' rights, freedoms and legal interests. They then introduce submissions to state bodies for consideration. Many of those submissions have proposed disciplinary action against officials who have broken the law, including their dismissal.

In 2020 alone, the president's virtual reception and the people's receptions received about 1.2 million applications. As a result, 752 senior officials who did not work according to our system's guidelines were brought to justice. Recently, we have observed a trend where all ministries have adopted virtual portals on their websites to receive applications and complaints from citizens.

Furthermore, responsible officials at all levels identify gaps in improving the population's living standards, gather the general

opinion of their citizens regarding reforms and organize their efforts on this basis. The government has also formed a system for organizing regular community, face-to-face receptions with presidential officials, ministries, agencies and the heads of administrations in outlying regions. In 2020 alone, Uzbekistan held more than 19,000 such field receptions, with resulting measures to solve more than 124,000 issues from approximately 120,000 representatives.

When drafting annual state programs within the framework of the tasks defined by the Strategy of Actions, officials closely study and consider topical issues raised by the population. We prioritize long-standing problems, proposals submitted by civil institutions and NGOs and critical analysis brought forth by the media and social media networks. After vetting, we present a draft program for public discussion, which is adopted only after considering the opinions of ordinary people, experts and representatives of international organizations.

In the renewed Uzbekistan, every individual holds the constitutional right to freedom of thought, speech and belief. State bodies have opened their "closed doors" to ensure transparency in their activities. The president regularly follows social networks and national and foreign media concerning societal problems. He reprimands

responsible leaders indifferent to resolving these issues and applies disciplinary sanctions, including dismissal, and calls on civil institutions to be uncompromising in these processes.

The adoption in March of this year by President Mirziyoyev of a resolution and a decree aimed at strengthening the development of civil society represents another step toward the development of civil society in Uzbekistan.

These two legal documents aim to ensure transparency among NGOs so that stakeholders can be aware of their activities. Ensuring civil institutions' transparency has been noted as one of the main directions of the "Concept for developing civil society in 2021-2025."

One should take special note that the president is deeply aware of how important and necessary the third sector's role is on the path of Uzbekistan's progressive development. President Mirziyoyev promotes ideas and initiatives that promise to establish a systemic and effective dialogue between citizens and civil society institutions under international standards. He seeks a multivector approach that combines all levels of society's efforts to develop a state that ensures the adherence to our values as a country and a practical approach to the betterment of the lives of its citizens.