

President Nazarbayev's Re-election : Welcome News for World Security and Prosperity

by

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Curtains came down on the Presidential elections in Kazakhstan on 26th April, 2015 with widely anticipated results. While the final verdict was very much along expected lines, the margin of victory is most impressive. The results were never in doubt but it is a moot point whether the supporters of President Nazarbayev who garnered 98% of the total votes polled could have imagined that their candidate would romp home so convincingly in a contest that by the end of the day became entirely one-sided. It needs to be noted that the number of votes cast in favour of President Nazarbayev in this election is significantly more than what he has polled in any of the earlier elections. In 1999 he received around 80% of the votes polled while in 2005 and 2011, he garnered 91% and 95.6% respectively of the votes cast. This performance becomes even more commendable when one considers that more than 95% of the electorate made the effort and cast their votes in the election, a number much higher than recorded anywhere else in any developed, democratic country.

The impressive results are a shining testimony to the popularity of President Nazarbayev and the love, affection and respect in which he is held by all segments of society and people in the country. This should come as no surprise. Nazarbayev strides like a colossus on the political, economic, cultural and social terra firma of the country. He assumed power before the country became independent and continues to be its unchallenged leader even 24 yrs after its independence. It can be said without much danger of exaggeration that the history of Kazakhstan since its independence from the Soviet rule in December, 1991 is the life story of Nursultan Nazarbayev over this period. Kazakhstan owes its current position in the international community as well as its security, stability and prosperity to the wise and far-sighted vision and policies of President Nazarbayev.

Kazakhstan's path over the last 24 years has not been easy. It has had to grapple with many adversities and challenges including the shock at its independence of a complete break from the economic, social and political system that it had been accustomed to for several decades before that. It was at such a juncture that the confident and steady hands of Nazarbayev took charge of the reins of power and guided the affairs of the country in a firm, stable and balanced manner.

President Nazarbayev captured the imagination of the people of Kazakhstan even before the country became independent by raising his voice in 1989 against the use of Semipalatinsk as a site for nuclear tests by the Soviet Union. Nazarbayev followed this through after he became the President of the country by banning the testing of nuclear weapons at this site on 29th August 1991, exactly 42 years after the first test was carried out in 1949. This intrepid and daring initiative was recognised by the international community when the United Nations decided in 2009 to mark 29th August, the day when nuclear testing was banned by Kazakhstan, as the International Day against Nuclear Tests. Nazarbayev also took the bold and courageous step of forsaking and giving up the world's 4th largest nuclear

arsenal, notwithstanding that Kazakhstan is surrounded on two sides by 2 nuclear weapon states. In the area of foreign relations, Nazarbayev launched the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) through his Address to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1992. President Nazarbayev has also pioneered the three yearly Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Four such highly successful conclaves have been held so far in Astana in 2003, 2006, 2009 and the last one in 2012. These meetings have grown in strength in numbers, participation and range of subjects deliberated upon with every passing year. These Meetings bring together leaders of all the major religions of the world to deliberate upon issues that confront them, in a friendly and cordial atmosphere to determine mutually acceptable and beneficial solutions. Another significant achievement of Kazakhstan is maintaining peace and tranquility amongst its more than 130 ethnic communities that inhabit this land.

In the national economic field, Kazakhstan has spearheaded the Strategy 2030 Initiative; ambitious plans to transform Kazakhstan into an Innovation Nation and bring it amongst the 50 most competitive economies of the world; established several new companies like Samruk-Kazyna to promote diversification of the economy and strengthen efficiency and competitiveness. Strategy 2030 has been further extended and expanded to Strategy 2050 to take Kazakhstan to new heights of economic growth and prosperity. Kazakhstan has also dealt effectively with the adverse impact of the international economic and financial crisis in 2007/08 and the European sovereign debt crisis in 2010 although it was the first to suffer the shock and brunt of these developments with large scale bankruptcies. Kazakhstan's economic initiatives have yielded significant and impressive results that have lifted large segments of the population above poverty line and helped to spread prosperity among all segments of the population.

Fresh elections were called in 2015, a year before they were scheduled, to enable Kazakhstan to deliver a strong, national mandate for a clear and decisive leadership to safely and skillfully chart the country's course through the current difficult and challenging times. The global outlook has seldom been as uncertain and demanding as it is today with violence and extremism on the rise in several parts of the world and continuing economic downturn and pessimism on this front internationally. The ongoing changes in Afghanistan with the withdrawal of US and NATO ISAF forces; air strikes by Saudi Arabia in Yemen against the Houthi rebels purportedly supported by Iran; rise of ISIS which has taken over vast swathes of land in Iraq and Syria and has also given rise to several splinter groups in the Region and other parts of the World; resurgent Islamic insurgency in Egypt; renewed civil war in Libya since last year, and continuing civil war in Syria are a cause of deep concern to the countries in the Region and the world at large. At this time of great insecurity and instability, people of Kazakhstan will be served well with a strong, tried and tested leadership at the helm of its affairs.

President Nazarbayev's re-election also presents a golden opportunity for reinvigoration of bilateral relations between India and Kazakhstan. President Nazarbayev chose India to be the first country of his visit outside CIS after Kazakhstan's independence in December 1991. President Nazarbayev is the only leader from Central Asia to have been honoured with the Invitation to be the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations. His visit in 2009 on the 60th anniversary of India's Republic Day transformed

our relations into one of strategic partnership and provided a powerful and compelling impulse to our bilateral ties.

Today India under the dynamic and inspiring leadership of Prime Minister Modi is poised to herald a new and brighter chapter of relations between the two countries. Kazakhstan is part of India's extended neighbourhood. PM Modi has pronounced several times that he accords primacy to relations with India's neighbours. India's \$2 trillion economy which grew at 7.5% last year and which is expected to increase by 8% this year presents a brilliant opportunity to the two countries to steer a quantum jump in bilateral relations to the next higher level. A bilateral visit at the highest level will go a long way in providing the required fillip to our relations.

Both India and Kazakhstan are factors of peace, stability, growth and development not only in their regions but also in the world. Stronger and deeper relations between these countries will further contribute to increasing prosperity and security for the peoples of the two countries as also for the world as a whole. President Nazarbayev's re-election will play a vital role in achieving these objectives.
