

Ilham Aliyev, farsighted leader of the nation

By Sara Rajabova

A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way. —John Maxwell

December 24 marks the birthday of President Ilham Aliyev.

Ilham Aliyev, who is the successor of founder of modern Azerbaijan, national leader Heydar Aliyev, holds one of the most important places in the modern history of the country.

As a result of his successful domestic and foreign policies and future-oriented strategies, Azerbaijan has moved forward in the path of development over a short period of time.

Regardless of the existing historical, political, geographical conditions and the nature of modern political system, the phenomenon of leadership plays a crucial role in the formation and development of a national state. So, the successful development of one country is the result of its farsighted leadership.

The era of Ilham Aliyev leadership of the country - from 2003 to the present day- has entered into the history of Azerbaijan as a period of comprehensive and rapid development.

Today, Azerbaijan takes one of the leading places among the rapidly developing countries. At the heart of this development is the successfully implemented far-sighted domestic and foreign policy course of the Azerbaijani leader.

Development strategy of Azerbaijan, implemented under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev, is aimed not only at economic growth and political stability, but also increasing the human capital and improving social structures.

He has pursued the strategic course laid earlier by great leader Heydar Aliyev.

The development is the fruit of various efforts, including successful application of various models of development, achievement of definite goals, systematic implementation of social and political reforms, enriching the legislative framework, creation of favorable conditions for the development of civil society and the rule of law, ensuring and preservation of political stability, which is based on strong foundations, rapid advancement of the international system of relations of the country.

The reforms carried out in the country over the past years by President Aliyev, diversification of the country's economy, social policy, oil strategy, GDP per capita, and proper use of budget revenues, all served to rapid development of the country. His presidency has seen unprecedented economic growth, reforms and inclusion of the poor in development marked by massive poverty reduction not seen anywhere in the west. The global economic crisis that has hit many countries of the world over the past several years had no impact on Azerbaijan.

Under leadership of Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan is modernizing its education, reforming its judiciary, infrastructure, agriculture and many other sectors of the economy.

Evidences of changes in the life of Azerbaijan under President Aliyev's prescient policy are visible without any need to sophisticated statistical and economic research.

Over the past ten years, the GDP increased by 3.4 times, the non-oil sector by 2.6 times, budget revenues by 16 times and the volume of strategic currency reserves exceeded \$50 billion. During these years, more than one million new jobs have been created in the country. Poverty and unemployment rate, which was 49 percent not long ago, has now declined to 5 percent. Azerbaijan's military budget was \$160 million in 2013 and now the figure has been set at \$2.27 billion in the budget for 2015.

Ilham Aliyev attaches special attention to ensuring and protecting the rights of people living in Azerbaijan with different ethnicities and religions.

Religious tolerance prevails in Azerbaijan and representatives of various peoples and religions live here in peace and harmony. People belonging to different cultures have been living in Azerbaijan like one family for centuries. Azerbaijan is recognized as one of the main centers of multiculturalism.

"Multiculturalism is a way of life in Azerbaijan. It may be a relatively new term but over the course of centuries Azerbaijan has had a multicultural society. Clear evidence of this is the friendship and solidarity among peoples," President Aliyev said in one of his speeches.

Azerbaijan is almost unique in terms of using its natural resources to ensure prosperity for ten generations. There are more examples showing an opposite trend in the world as the valuable national resources, such as oil and gas usually bring up problems rather than serving the nations' prosperity.

However, Ilham Aliyev with a visionary and comprehensive energy policy has turned Azerbaijan's natural resources into a sustainable development tool for the country. His well-thought out strategy has yielded enormous benefits to Azerbaijan.

Ilham Aliyev took an active part in implementation of oil strategy designed by Heydar Aliyev.

His efforts served to succession and realization of this policy in the world, as well as development of different projects. His energy policy also played an important role in attracting investments in the country.

President Aliyev had made great contributions to the largest transit project Baku- Tbilisi- Ceyhan pipeline, which was successfully commissioned transporting Caspian oil to foreign markets.

The Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic pipeline projects - the world's largest energy projects -are the brainchildren of Ilham Aliyev, which can change the energy map of the region and Europe.

Energy policy pursued by President Aliyev paved the way for transforming and diversifying Azerbaijani economy.

Azerbaijan plays an important role not only in the energy sector, but also other sectors determining the geopolitical trends in Eurasia. The policies pursued by President Aliyev turned Azerbaijan into regional power with global plans.

Modern Azerbaijan is a country with a great geopolitical importance, economic achievements and political initiatives fully recognized by the international community. Azerbaijan has proven to the world that it is not only oil and Olympic power, but also a space power.

Full support of the people of Azerbaijan has greatly inspired Ilham Aliyev to open up new horizons in his activities. Wide world-outlook, deep and thorough knowledge of Ilham Aliyev have brought him high respect and authority as a modern and agile politician.

Aliyev's decisive and purposeful activities contribute to the successful implementation of Heydar Aliyev's foreign policy and exposures to the world the aggressive position of Armenian invaders violating the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

In the quickly changing modern world, he has successfully represented the interests of Azerbaijan at various international meetings and high level negotiations. His policies are now gaining momentum in resolving new international and regional problems.

Ilham Aliyev carries out wise internal reforms and implements purposeful foreign policies aimed at turning Azerbaijan into a leading country across the South Caucasus.

Aliyev was born in Baku on December 24, 1961.

He graduated the Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO) in 1982. Upon his graduation, Ilham Aliyev continued his education as a postgraduate student at MGIMO and received a Ph.D. degree in history in 1985.

He taught at the Moscow State University of International Relations between 1985 and 1990.

Ilham Aliyev was involved in the private business sector, heading a number of industrial-commercial enterprises from 1991 to 1994.

He was vice president, and later the first vice president of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) from 1994 to 2003. He was actively involved in the implementation of Heydar Aliyev's oil strategy.

Ilham Aliyev was twice elected to the Milli Majlis (parliament) of Azerbaijan in 1995 and 2000, and resigned from his post in 2003 due to his appointment to the post of prime minister.

In addition to his existing responsibilities, Ilham Aliyev presided over the National Olympic Committee since 1997.

He has been elected deputy chairman of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party in 1999, first deputy chairman in 2001, and party chairman in 2005.

He headed the Azerbaijani parliamentary delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from 2001 to 2003.

Ilham Aliyev was elected deputy chairman of PACE and member of the PACE bureau in January 2003.

Ilham Aliyev was elected president of the republic on October 15, 2003, gaining over 76 percent of the vote. He assumed his post on October 31, 2003.

Ilham Aliyev was re-elected for a second term, winning 88 percent of votes in the elections, held on October 15, 2008. He assumed the duties of the presidency on October 24, 2008.

On October 9, 2013, Ilham Aliyev was elected for a third term by an overwhelming majority of voters (84.54 percent) for next five years. He assumed the post on October 19, 2013.

Azerbaijani people made their choice. They voted for political stability, prosperity and sustainable socio-economic development.

The staff of the AzerNews newspaper sincerely congratulates President Aliyev on his birthday.