CHAPTER-IV

Uzbekistan’s Quest for Democratisation in the post-Soviet Phase
The Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan attained independence after the disintegration of Soviet Union in December 1991. It has been pointed out that the urge of the pro-West democratic Russian elite to off-load the burdensome Central Asian republics in order to achieve speedy modernisation through free-market reforms, rather than the secessionist desire of the Central Asian ruling elites was the real cause of the break up of the unified Soviet states. Strangely, in the March 1991 referendum, 90 to 95 percent of the electorate in the Central Asian republics had supported the preservation of the USSR as against only 53.5 percent in the Russian republic favouring its continued existence.¹

Soon after attaining some sort of ‘forced independence’ the Central Asian republics faced numerous problems in their path. The most important problems were creating a national identity for the Central Asian people, presence of large number of ethnic Russian minorities in Central Asian republics and problems emerging due to transitional nature of the economy from a command and state regulated economic system to a market oriented economy. The above mentioned factors complicated their path of independence from republics of Soviet Union to newly independent states. The problems faced by the Central Asian states are quite similar to the problems many Third World countries experienced after gaining independence.

The departure of the British, Portuguese and French from their colonies after the end of Second World War put countries of Asia and Africa in deep turmoil. For example, soon after British withdrew from India, it led to the partition of India on the basis of religion which finally culminated in the creation of India and Pakistan. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, deep ethnic conflict took place among native Sinhalese and ethnic Tamils, which is continuing in Sri Lanka even today.

A second problem the successor states faced after the departure of their colonial master was violent conflicts among the various ethnic groups. The minorities, who feel discriminated and feel excluded from the national power structure, apprehend a threat to their identity. This compels the minorities to seek outside help from those countries with whom they have close ethnic bond.2

The third feature of states which attained their independence from their colonial master is that they don’t have the political institutional mechanism to cope with the problems which they face. Political institutionalisation refers to the legitimacy (degree of support) and capacity (ability to extract resources, maintain stability and cope with the opposition whether by repression, co-optation or offering opportunities for participation) possessed by states. Closely related to political institutionalisation is social mobilisation. Social mobilisation may be defined as the increased aspirations and activism of citizens who organize and make demands on the state as a result of dissatisfaction and exposure to (internal and external) political, cultural, economic and religious

forces. The weaker political institutionalisation is in relation to social mobilisation, the greater are the chances that the state will be overburdened and hence susceptible to instability. It should be observed that if social mobilisation among the masses takes place but the political institution is not capable to meet the demands generated through social mobilisation than institutional decay took place.³

As pointed out by Rajan Menon and Hendrik Spruyt, the challenges posed by social mobilisation in countries where political institutionalisation took place can be met through following strategies: Firstly, the ruling elite might highlight differences and controversies with other republics and perhaps even resort to war to justify efforts to increase state capacities as a means to social mobilisation outward. They not only try to highlight conflicts with other states, but also sometime mention challenges posed by various non-state actors and countries that not belong to their region. For example in South Asian context, Pakistan due to its unstable political institutional mechanism, is not able to meet the needs and aspirations of people generated through social mobilisation. By professing and practising anti-Indian policies and measures as a mechanism it tries to divert attention of the people.

Second, state elites can seek to co-opt social mobilisation. Such a strategy would use civic organisations, a free press, elections and parliaments (all mechanisms for extending political participation to same social mobilisation by diverting it

from streets to political institutions). As a result, dissatisfaction could be manifested through institutions resulting in within system bargaining and resolution. This type of social mobilisation is generally practiced in various democratic countries like India, USA and France, which have developed democratic culture.

The final mechanism by which a state structure meets the demands raised by the social forces is through repression and blocking the political participation of opposition. The political elites try to achieve political legitimisation through oppression. This kind of mobilisation generally is followed in many countries having authoritarian regime like Pakistan, Sudan and Libya.

The Central Asian political elites tried their best to fulfil the needs and aspirations of the people and develop institutional mechanism to iron out their problems. They also adopted different mobilisation strategies to take on the challenges posed by elements of social mobilisation. However, it differs from country to country depending upon the nature of problem posed by social forces. For example, the first category of social mobilisations as pointed by Rajan Menon and Hendrik Spruyt can be best applicable to Tajikistan. In Tajikistan, structural disequilibrium between weak political institutionalisation and strong social mobilisation led to the breakdown of state authority. In Tajikistan, the regime faced intractable challenges from democrats, Islamic movement and various tribal and clan groups, each trying to take over political power.⁴

The second category of political institutionalisation is generally followed in almost all the Central Asian republics, though in theory their constitutions guarantee extensive freedom to opposition and to political associations but in reality suppression of opposition continued.

**Type of Political Model for Central Asian Republics**

Like any newly independent country of the Third World, the Central Asian republics also face a dilemma as to which political model they should adopt for their overall development and which can help consolidate their independent entity in international arena.

The political elite faced a dilemma, they either had to quit the political scene or they had to develop new economic policies, a new political ideology and to find new allies in the comity of nations, if they choose to remain in power. The former communist elites were in dilemma over the choice of political ideologies for governance of their country. They were quit aware of the fact that Marxism and Leninism as ideologies have been discredited. In order to mobilise people they needed a political programme that will rally the people around them. This led to a search for an appropriate political model. Considering their past history, culture, political expediency following models were possible options for them.

**Turkish Model**

After achieving independence, the Central Asian leaders turned towards Turkey as a perfect model of modern state. The main principle of the Turkish model was its emphasis on the fundamental principles of nationalism, national character
and revolutionary change. The Kemalist economic system which includes principle of mixed economy and means to attract foreign capital to accelerate the development of a capitalist economy. It was considered an appropriate model for transition of the socialist economies of the Central Asian states. ⁵

From the political point of view, the Central Asian states had a natural affinity to the Kemalist form of democracy, which could provide a balance between the traditional Central Asian society and the deep rooted and established norms of Soviet era. Turkey wanted to develop close relationship with these Central Asian states. Turkey tried to develop relationship with those new states on the basis of respect for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs and equal and common benefits and informed that they would also be expected, both by Turkey and by the world at large, to respect the principles of the UN charter, the CSCE principles, human rights and their obligations under the agreement signed by the erstwhile Soviet Union as well to uphold democracy and the rule of law. ⁶

In President Demirel’s words, Turkey had proved that Islam, democracy, human rights and the market economy could go together hand in hand. ⁷ The importance of Turkey as a perfect model for Central Asian leaders can be understood from

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the fact that soon after attaining independence presidents of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan visited Turkey and signed a number of agreements.

Turkey also shares close cultural and linguistic affinities with the Central Asian republics. This provided an added advantage to Turkey as a model of development. To bolster its relationship with Central Asian republics, Turkey launched a number of policy initiatives like providing technical, financial assistance to the Central Asian countries. It also used regional cooperation organisation Economic Co-Operation Organisation (ECO). Apart from the Central Asian countries ECO now also includes many non-Central Asian countries like Pakistan and Iran.

The Sultan Galiev Model

The new Central Asian leaders were also attracted to the writings of Tatar Muslim Marxist Sultan Galiev of 1920's. The importance of this model lies in the fact that it combines three ideological movements, which has significant influence in Central Asia namely-Pan-Islamic, Pan-Turkic and Marxist. Like other religions, he considers Islam not merely a religion but also an integral system that governs the way people lead their lives, a system moreover which could be destroyed only at the risk of provoking a popular uprising. He believed in systematic and planned elimination of fundamentalist elements in Islam and not destroying Islam Itself.

Another element in Sultan Galiev's thinking was that of uniting all the Turkish people and in which their ideal national aspiration could be realized. At the same
time, he believed that Marxism is the means by which their ideal national aspirations could be realised and social equality and justice could be achieved. But he viewed the present system of Communism as a product of Western industrial capitalist system which would not suit the Asian countries. So he advocated a new format of Communism, which will suit to the socio-economic development of Asian countries, and their spiritual values and way of life. 8

**Islamic Model**

A third model that has come into the picture for the Central Asian republics is the Islamic model with a theocratic state. Initially many political analysts shared this view, because of their Muslim heritage and fear that national xenophobia legitimatized by the fall of Communism could be reinforced by religious extremism. 9 The assumption got further strengthened by the region’s geographical closeness to Iran and possibility of Iran’s interest in promoting its own brand of radical Shia Islam. Another factor which added impetus to this argument was the victory of brand of an extremely radical Islam in Afghanistan under Taliban.

Despite the pros and cons of each model, the political system of Central Asia, developed by the political elites, included all the above three models, at least in parts. This is reflected in their economic, political and social policies:

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8 Igor P. Lipovsky, op.cit, p. 214.
Firstly, an economic system has been advocated that is a half way between the Turkish 1980s economic liberalism under Turgutozal and the mixed economy developed by Ismat Inane during 1960s.

Secondly, a type of ‘controlled democracy’ that had reflected the characteristics of Turkish Republics’ People Party between 1946-50.

Third, at ideological level, some of the Galiev’s idea of building consensus through compromise between nationalism, Islam and state politics has been adopted.

Finally, the Central Asian elite provide space for religion which will check the fundamentalist element in the religion. The Central Asian political elite by applying these models tried to make a smooth transition from being a part of former Soviet Union to being independent nation-states in the international political system.10

Democratisation and Political Development in Other Central Asian Republics

Before analysing the democratic development in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, it is necessary to analyse the political development in other Central Asian republics. Because, this will provide an overall comparative framework to analyse to what extent Uzbekistan is democratic and what is the future of democracy in Uzbekistan.

Turkmenistan was in fact the first Central Asian state where sustained efforts were made to establish a constitution. The Turkmen constitution was adopted on 18th May 1992. It defines Turkmenistan as a “Presidential Republic”. It has a President, a Prime Minister, and a parliament called a Supreme Soviet. In addition, government also includes a *khalk maslakhaty* (people’s council), which has responsibility for the passage of constitutional amendments.\(^\text{11}\) The *Khalka Maslakhaty* (People’s Council) plays an important role especially in the passage of constitutional amendments. In the executive sphere, Turkmenistan has established a presidential form of government. The constitution of Turkmenistan vests enormous powers in the hands of President. He is not only the head of state and executive organs of the government but has also other prerogatives like head of People’s Council, which consists of veterans and eminent public figures. Soon after independence Turkmenistan made its journey towards democratisation process when it held the presidential election in June 1992. In the presidential election, Niyazov was re-elected unopposed by securing 99.5 percent of votes in a direct election. The personality cult of Niyazov got further enhanced when the People’s Council conferred the rank of ‘general’ on him in the session held in December 1992.\(^\text{12}\)

The Turkmen President in order to consolidate his dominance in the affairs of state developed a sort of “personality cult” in Turkmen politics. This is evident


from the fact that numerous streets and public buildings were renamed after him. His more commonly used title in Turkmenistan is Turkmenbashi (Head of the Turkmen).

This tribal mode of address basically aimed at native people and expected to popular awe and loyalty which will ensure dominance of Niyazov Turkmen politics. This was reflected in the patently undemocratic move of the ruling Democratic party to cancel the proposed presidential election to be held on 1997. The Majlis (parliament) in the following month duly voted to extend the term of President to 2002 on the ground that the republics' political and economic stability depend on the realization of Niyazov's '10 years of Prosperity' programme of gradual reforms. The extension of Niyazov's presidency was endorsed by 99.99 percent of the electorate in a referendum held on 15 January 1994. Recently he has been made President for life but he has declared not to continue beyond 5 years i.e. 2007.13

In December 1994 the election to the new Majlis were held. In the election 99.8 percent of the electorate participated.14 In the election 49 of the 50 deputies were elected unopposed and for one seat only two persons contested.15

The last election to the Majlis which was held on 12 December 1999 was not free and fair and several electoral malpractices were witnessed. It was reported

13 Devendra Kaushik, (Eurasian Studies) op. cit, p. 7
15 David Nissman, op. cit., p. 653.
that some 99 percent of the electorate participated in the election and the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan was the only party represented by contestants. International organisations like OSCE declined to participate in the election claiming widespread practice of illegal methods for the fifty members Assembly.16

Despite these elections, the process of democratisation in Turkmenistan has a long way to go. There is still gross violations of human rights and suppression of dissidents. In November 1994, the Turkmen government arrested two persons who were members of Turkmenistan Fund in Moscow, on charges of attempting to assassinate Niyazov. In June 1995, the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan sentenced two opposition leaders to imprisonment for 10 and 12 years. In January, 1996, 27 people were tried and imprisoned for their participation in July 1995, Ashgabat demonstration. In March 2000, the leader of the unregistered Popular Front Agzybirlik, Nurberdy Nurmeamedov was sentenced to five years of imprisonment on charge of hooliganism.17 In Turkmenistan there is not only harassment of opposition leaders but the government also has taken a number of measures to muzzle freedom of speech and expression. Censorship of press is also carried out with an iron hand.

Kazakhstan is relatively better credited, yet democratisation is far from satisfactory even there. In December 1991, Nazarbayev became President through uncontested elections receiving 98 percent of votes in a contested

16 Europa Year Book, op.cit, p. 3652.
17 Devendra Kaushik, (Eurasian Studies) op.cit, pp. 14-15.
election. The only serious opposition candidate Hassan Kozhakhmetov, the leader of the Kazakh Nationalist Movement, Zheltogsan, could not enter the race as he was unable to procure the requisite 1,000,000 signatures. In Kazakhstan an attempt was made to democratise the country when the parliament ratified the country's first post-Soviet constitution in January 1993. However, to reflect the charging realities, the Kazakh constitution was offered for public approval. The 30 August 1995 referendum attracted 91 percent of eligible voters of which 89 percent supported the new constitution. Like a true democratic country the constitution of Kazakhstan states that, 'Kazakhstan is a Democratic, Secular and Unitarian state' and adds that, 'the people of Kazakhstan are sole bearers of state power of the republic'.

The constitution also offered a plethora of rights to individuals like freedom of speech, freedom to the media, freedom to demonstrate peacefully and freedom to create social organisations. The 1995 constitution offered more powers to President at the expense of parliament. The new constitution also established a bi-cameral legislature for Kazakhstan. Under the provisions enshrined in the 1993 constitution, the first parliamentary election was held on 7 March 1994. In the elections 75 percent of voters took part. The elections were held in all constituencies of the country. A total of 135 deputies were elected to the Supreme Soviet on a territorial basis and 42 from the federal list submitted by

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20 Shireen T. Hunter, op.cit, p. 42.
21 Ian Bremmer and Cory Welt, op.cit.
Nursultan Nazarbayev. A total of 75 deputies were elected from political parties and movements, 60 deputies were nominated and 33 deputies were administrative heads.\textsuperscript{22} Among the political parties SNEK (Union of National Unity) secured 30 seats. Trade Union Federation of the Republic of Kazakhstan secured 11 seats. People's Congress of Kazakhstan and the Socialist Party of Kazakhstan got 8 seats each. Other parties secured fewer seats than these above four parties.\textsuperscript{23} During the parliament elections a number of violations took place in Kazakhstan. The legislative districts were gerrymandered to create Kazakh majority district. Campaigning was also restricted so that voters had difficulty in learning political affiliations of the candidates.\textsuperscript{24}

At the end of May 1994 the parliament passed a vote of no-confidence in the government headed by Sergei Tereshchenko, whom Nazarbaev had appointed as Prime Minister. In mid-October, Nazarbaev was finally compelled to accept the resignation of the Treschenko government. He appointed Akezhan Kazhegeldin as Prime Minister. However, a new development took place in Kazakhstan politics when some alleged violations were made during parliamentary election held in March 1994. The constitutional court also upheld the complaints of Tatiana Kviatkovskaia that a large number of irregularities were practised during elections. This led to the resignation of Akezhan Kazhegeldin as prime minister.

\textsuperscript{22} SWB\textsuperscript{SU}A1944\textsuperscript{G}1, 12 March 1994.
\textsuperscript{23} SWB\textsuperscript{SU}A1955\textsuperscript{G}2, 25 March 1994.
\textsuperscript{24} Martha Brill Olcott, "The Growth of Political Participation in Kazakhstan," In Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrots, (eds.), op.cit, p. 220.
and it was accepted by the President because this government was formed by the dissolved parliament.\textsuperscript{25}

So, taking into account the experiences that Nazarbayev got after the dissolution of parliament, he inserted a new provision in the new constitution that empowered the President and placed him above the Parliament. In April 1995 through a referendum the tenure of the Parliament was extended up to the year 2001. The new constitution’s provisions which provided for a strong and powerful presidency and coupled with the extension of his tenure made Nazarbaev a dominant factor in Kazakh politics. In October 1998, both houses proposed constitutional reforms and an amendment postponing the presidential election to January 1999 was passed with an overwhelming majority of votes. The minimum age for the election of President was also raised from 35 to 45 years and maximum age of 65 was abolished.\textsuperscript{26}

In the January 1999 election to the post of President, Nazarbaev registered a landslide victory receiving an overwhelming majority of votes (81 percent of total votes cast). His opponent Serikbolsgin Abdildin of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan secured a paltry 12 percent of the total votes cast.\textsuperscript{27} However, during the elections many electoral irregularities were noticed by the international observers, including those from OSCE,\textsuperscript{28} though it was claimed free and fair by the Kazakh government. Similarly large-scale electoral

\textsuperscript{25} FBIS-SOV-95-049, 14 March 1995, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{26} Devendra Kaushik, (Eurasian Studies) op.cit, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{28} SWB:SU/3429/032, 11 January 1999.
irregularities took place during the elections to the lower assemblies of parliament which were held on 10 October 1999. The result came out in 17 October 1999. In this election over 547 candidates, members in single mandate constituencies stood for 67 seats in the Majlis. In the election to the Majlis held in October, 65 candidates from nine political parties contested 10 seats allocated for the first time on the basis of party list system while about 500 candidates contested for the remaining 67 seats from single member constituencies. All the 10 party list seats were filled in the first round of elections (the pro-President Vatan Party winning 4 seats and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, the Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan and the Civic Party of Kazakhstan won 2 seats each). Of the 67 directly contested seats, 20 were filled in the first round of elections and ‘run off’ elections were held for 47 seats. Finally, Vatan Party emerged as the largest party in the Majlis with 23 seats. The civic party won 13 seats. The communist party of Kazakhstan to a great extent condemned the irregularities that were practised in the parliamentary elections. Abedildin the leader of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan noted that the election results were rigged to cast doubt on the result of the elections by party list. Not only free and fair election in Kazakhstan is a mirage, but also the human rights record in Kazakhstan is also quite miserable and there has been continuing suppression of opposition parties.

The case of Tajikistan is a peculiar one when an evaluation is made with regard to democratisation process. Like other Central Asian republics, in Tajikistan also

29 Devendra Kaushik, (Eurasian Studies) op.cit. p.11.
30 SWBISUS3670v03, 20 October 1999.
some form of authoritarian element can be found in the democratic process. What complicates the process is division of country into various regions and each region is dominated by a regional warlord.

This factor to some extent hinders the democratic and nation-building process of Tajikistan. The Tajik constitution which was adopted on 6 November 1994 through the nationwide referendum theoretically provided extensive rights to the people. Article 10 of the constitution provided that the constitution of Tajikistan has supreme authority. Article 6 of the constitution prescribed that people are sole expressions of sovereignty and sole sources of power. Article 48 provides that Supreme Assembly is the highest legislative body of the republic with tenure of five years. Article 64 provides that the President of the Republic of Tajikistan is the head of state and the executive authority. The elections to the assembly were held on 26 February 1995. The Central Election Commission reported that over 85 percent of electorate participated in the elections to Supreme Assembly.\textsuperscript{31} In the Supreme Assembly, the communists became the single largest majority party securing 60 seats in the new legislature. Other political parties like the People's Party, the Party of National Unity and the Party of Political and Economic Renovation had secured six seats in the elections.\textsuperscript{32} Despite the claim by the government that election was free and fair large scale violations took place. Some influential international organisations who monitored the elections pointed out that the elections were held under the threat

\textsuperscript{31} FBIS-SOV-95-040, 1 March 1995, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{32} FBIS-SOV-95-048, 13 March 1995, p. 72.
of arms and in an unhappy atmosphere in most areas controlled by government forces.33

The presidential election was held in September 1994. In the election Rahmonov and Abduljahanov contested the election. Rahmonov was supported by districts governed by Dushanbe, Khatlon Regional Council and Union of Youth of Tajikistan. Abdullajanov got support from Leninabad region.34 This shows that even after attaining independence the clan and regional division still exists at the political level and E. Rahmonov got largest percentage of votes (60 percent of votes) while Abdullajnov got 35 percent of votes.35

Despite the proclamation by government that elections was free and fair, it was far from satisfactory. The authorities put number of restrictions during election campaigning like not giving free access to Abdullajanov and Human rights Watch and Helsinki International Organisation. The presidential elections in Tajikistan were not without charges of unfairness.36 The last presidential election held on 6 November 1999 was also not free from allegations. In the election President Rahmonov received 97 percent of the total votes while rival Davlat Usmonov got a meagre 2 percent of total votes cast.37 In the election to the new Assembly of Representatives which was held in February 2000, President Rahmonov’s party PDPT won 64.5 percent of total votes polled along

33 FBIS-SOV-95-040, 1 March 1995, p. 65.
36 A. I. Kuzmin, op.cit, p. 199.
37 SWB/ SU/ 3686/ G/ 1, 8 November 1999 and also SWB/ SU/ 3687/ G/ 1, 9 November 1999.
with its allies bagging 45 of the 63 seats. The Communist Party received around 20.6 percent of the votes winning 13 seats. The Islamic Rebirth Party did not fare well. It received about 7.5 percent votes gaining just 2 seats. There were a number of allegations of poll code violations in both the elections.\textsuperscript{38}

The case of Kyrgyzstan with regard to its journey in the direction of democracy is quite exceptional in comparison with other Central Asian republics. Some analysts noted that the process that took place in Kyrgyzstan during its first two years of independence earned it a reputation as an ‘oasis of democracy’ in the harsh political landscape of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{39} In Kyrgyzstan a new constitution came into existence on 5 May 1993, after a lot of debate and discussion on the question of whether to adopt presidential or parliamentary form of government. Article 1 of Kyrgyz Constitution describing it as a ‘sovereign, democratic, republic’ built upon the legal and secular basis and is the carrier of sovereignty by the people of Kyrgyzstan. In terms of political structures provisions are made for the future election of a smaller, 105 seat professional assembly called the Zhogorku Kenesh (Supreme Council). This body was empowered to approve key presidential appointments, to legislate and to override presidential vetoes of legislations in certain circumstances. The President who has to be a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, over 35 years old, must know the state language and must have been resident in the republic at least for 15 years, was given the power to

\textsuperscript{38} Tajikistan, \textit{Europa Year Book}, op.cit, p. 3508.
\textsuperscript{39} Eugene Husky, “Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization”, in Karen Dawish and Bruce Parrot (eds.), op.cit, p. 242.
appoint Prime Minister and other key officials with the approval of parliament and was given the power to initiate the dissolution of the parliament. The New Constitution also guaranteed citizens a wide range of civil and political rights so long as these were exercised within the framework of the law.\textsuperscript{40}

The image of Akaev as a champion of democracy began to wane towards the end of 1995. This was following the parliamentary elections held on 9 February 1995. In this election, widespread electoral malpractices were reported. The 24 December 1995 presidential elections further consolidated the position of Akaev in Kyrgyz politics. In the election Akaev secured around 75\% of vote while his opponents, Kyrgyzstan communist party leader Absamat Masaliyev and former parliamentary speaker Medetkan Sherimykulov, polled 24.4 percent and 1.7 percent votes respectively.\textsuperscript{41}

In the presidential election that was held on 29 October 2000, Akaev secured 74.45 percent of total votes, while his opponents Omurbek Tekebayev secured 13.85 percent, Alamazbek Atambayev 6 percent, Melis Eshimkanov 1.08 percent, Tturshnbay Bakir UULU about one percent and Tursunbek Akunov 0.44 percent of the votes.\textsuperscript{42} This election was also not free and fair, mass protests took place against the declaration of result. The presidential candidate Omurbek Tekebayev called for nullification of the results of the presidential


\textsuperscript{41} "Kyrgyzstan", \textit{Europa Year Book}, op.cit, p. 2190.

\textsuperscript{42} SWB/SU/3986/G1 and G/2, 1 November 2000.
election, the ending of the Presidential form of government and holding of new elections. The OSCE also severely criticised the elections results claiming that the Presidential election fell short of the country’s commitments to the OSCE.43

Although the republic of Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty on 20 June 1990, yet then sovereignty meant, “Sovereignty within the confines of the USSR”. However, the coup which took place in August 1991 radically changed the political scenario of Soviet Union and this provided the opportunity to the Uzbek political leaders to appraise the political situation that was there after the August coup. Karimov resigned from the communist party and property of the party was nationalized. Subsequent events like resignation of Islam Karimov from the Communist Party and its nationalization had a great impact on the politics of Soviet Uzbekistan. Finally, on 11 September 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence.

Uzbekistan’s Quest for Democratisation in Post-Independence Phase

Like other Central Asian republics, the endless quest of Uzbekistan in its efforts towards democratisation is no less a smooth one. Uzbekistan’s quest for democratisation faced a number of serious problems due to absence of conditions or elements which facilitates the process. Robert A. Dahl in his book ‘On Democracy’ has pointed out six characteristics that facilitate the development of democracy which are as follow44:

43 Ibid.
• elected officials;
• Free, fair and frequent elections;
• freedom of expression;
• alternative sources of information;
• associational autonomy;
• Inclusive democracy.

The absence of these conditions in pre-Soviet and Soviet Uzbekistan retarded the development of democratisation process. The study of Uzbekistan's democratisation process can be studied in three phases:

• Period of Transition
• Period of Consolidation
• Period of Development

Period of Transition

After attaining some sort of 'forced independence', like other Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan embarked on its path towards democratisation. On 1 September 1991 Uzbekistan declared itself independent and on 30 August 1991, Uzbekistan Communist Party was rechristened as People's Democratic Party and inherited all the properties of Communist Party of Uzbekistan. Like other Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan also faced a number of political, social and economic problems. The problem of legitimisation of rule by ex-communist
rulers is the most critical one. Max Weber refers to three types of legitimisation: traditional, charismatic and rational-legal. Each model has its own difficulties while applying to Uzbekistan. The modernised legitimization which can be applied to the South East Asian leaders like Suharto, the then President of Indonesia and Jawaharil Nehru of India is the difficult to apply to Uzbekistan due to various difficulties that plague the country after independence.

Similarly, the charismatic model of legitimisation is also rendered difficult by the non-charismatic nature of President Islam Karimov. Neither the traditional model of legitimisation which Islamisation can provide nor legal bureaucratic model as developed by Weber would be easy to apply. Although each particular model of legitimisation is quite difficult to apply in Uzbekistan, the legitimisation models, all of Max Weber, can be useful to study Uzbekistan’s political process since independence.

The erection of memorials in memory of great Uzbek king Timur recently in Tashkent whose period was also known as Golden Age in Uzbek history led to the belief that by portraying Timur, Karimov wants to legitimise his rule and by comparing himself with the incomparable Timur, follows the charismatic model of legitimisation as defined by Max Weber. Secondly, he sincerely tried to put much emphasis on Islam. Having realised that Islam can play a crucial role in Uzbekistan especially in the mobilization of masses, he himself went to Mecca in 1992 on a pilgrimage and then said that ‘when we were allowed to enter

Kabba, I prayed to God for my people’. This sort of model is closely related to traditional model of legitimisation. Similarly, holding of elections and enacting constitution, creating a secular constitution etc. are closely related to the legal, rational and bureaucratic model given by Max Weber.

In fact, this model is closely related to Turkish pattern followed by Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Ataturk) in Turkey. The Turkish leader introduced principles of secular state, equal rights of women, European clothes, Calendar, civil marriage, schools and European medical institutions. This Turkish model can be applied to Uzbekistan. However, the reforms introduced in Turkey have been practised in Uzbekistan since Soviet period.

The initial period, which is also known as ‘period of transition’, began when the first presidential elections was held in December 1991. A number of flaws existed in the election process and it showed the circumscribed intention of Karimov to democratize the country.

Soon after attaining independence, the first task that Islam Karimov did was holding of presidential elections in December 1991. The draft law with regard to presidential elections came out in October 1991, which provided that the registered political parties could nominate their candidates through the assemblies in the area, where they were established. It also provided that candidate receiving more than 50 percent of the votes will be elected. It also

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provided that the age of the presidential candidate should be between 37 and 69 years. At the same time, Uzbek Communist Party itself got dissolved in September 1991 and changed its name into Peoples Democratic Party (Uzbekistan Halk Demokratik Firkusi). The party stood for the improving socio-economic and cultural life of the individual citizens. It planned to participate actively in the forthcoming presidential election.

It was hoped that after September 1991, the political scenario of the country would improve. But it was proved wrong and suppression of opposition continued. For example, the Peoples Movement of Uzbekistan decided to hold a rally dedicated to the victory of democratic forces in Russia. But contrary to expectation, the state authorities took unprecedented and stern actions to suppress the rally and arrested several members of Birlik. At the same time, a new political party came into existence named “Erk” (freedom). It stood for struggle for human rights, the national revival of the republic and complete independence of Uzbekistan. The party was formed under the leadership of Muhammad Salih. This party was joined by scientists, intellectuals and writers. Islam Karimov’s limited inclination to the process of democratisation of the country was demonstrated by the developments that took place before the presidential election of Uzbekistan.

Despite the election was declared to be held on December 29 1991, rules and regulations governing the conduct of elections were published only on 23 November 1991. Even worse, the rules for collecting signatures which non-party
organizations had to submit to the Central Election Commission by December 3 were not promulgated until 26 November 1991. Due to weekend and the three days required to call a nomination meeting, groups other than registered parties were in effect given only one day to gather necessary signatures. Similarly, differential standards were adopted while registering political parties. Erk party stood for 'the struggle for human rights, the national revival of the republic and the complete independence of Uzbekistan'. The party also favoured the consolidation of all people residing in Uzbekistan. It was formed under the leadership of Muhammad Salih. It was registered on the same day, on 4 October 1991, the day it applied for registration. However, the Birlik party was refused registration on the ground that two parties could not be registered with the same name as popular movement. Since Birlik failed to register itself as a political party, as per the election regulation, it should collect the minimum signatures of 60,000 to get nomination for presidential election. Although it collected 63,000 signatures, 3,000 more than required, it failed to get itself registered, because the government rejected 25,000 of signatures. As a result of this Abdurahim Polatov, the Birlik leader failed to contest the presidential elections. Not only Birlik failed to register itself as a party and could not participate in the elections but the government also put tremendous pressure on Birlik during this period.

At the call of Peoples' Movement of Uzbekistan, a rally was organised on 8 September 1991, dedicated to the victory of the democratic forces in Russia.

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government took stringent measures to suppress the rally and arrested a number of Birlik members. Their flats were searched, Lenin Square was surrounded by a circle of militia and the main and Central Street was cordoned off.49 This shows the commitment of Karimov towards democratisation process after Uzbekistan’s declaration of Independence in September 1991. The authoritarian modernisation process as practised by Islam Karimov provoked Birlik leaders to organise themselves more effectively and arouse a fierce public opinion against the government, but could achieve little. Failure of the Birlik leader Polatov to get him nominated to the post of President led to situation in which two candidates contested in the presidential elections. The Peoples Democratic Party of Uzbekistan got registered itself on 18 November 1991, under the chairmanship of Islam Karimov, who got himself nominated from PDP for the post of President.50 As per the electoral laws, the expenditure incurred during the campaigning period was borne by government and it was notified that equal time access will be given to all candidates in the mass media, but discrimination took place. Although, Karimov’s speech was regularly broadcast on television, Salih got barely few minutes of air time despite the protest made by Erk and Birlik members.

In the presidential election, Islam Karimov won 86 percent of votes, while Muhammed Salih secured 12 percent of votes. If we analyse the voting pattern many Russians voted for Karimov, his ethnic policy and decrees in the defence

49 SWBISLAII73\B\IO, 10 September 1991.
50 SWBISLAII234\B\9, 20 November 1991.
of the rights and freedoms of people of any nation or creed living in Uzbekistan played a crucial role in getting overwhelming support from ethnic minorities.\(^{51}\)

He got large support from the countryside, with sixty percent of the electorate. One of the primary reasons for this was his 1989 decree which distributed around 5,50,000 hectares of land to private homes and for cattle grazing to the members of cooperative firms which in 1991 benefited 2.5 million families. The wide publicity surrounding the measure also helped.\(^{52}\) Despite Karimov winning with an overwhelming majority, a number of irregularities were noticed during the election process. The *Erk* party alleged that there were numerous violations of election law, including failure to include its representatives in the Election Commission at all levels.

President Karimov after receiving massive mandate from the people utilised this tide in his favour to continue and consolidate his authoritarian style of ruling. He also acted as an exponent of the will of the people and the messiah of the masses. The Uzbek President has argued that the western notion of democracy cannot be applicable to the conditions prevailing in Uzbekistan as this is likely to promote political instability and thus the developmental process in Uzbekistan will be at stake. On one occasion he declined to give interview to one western media on the plea that “they have repeatedly made Uzbekistan appear to be some kind of African dictatorship”.\(^{53}\)

\(^{51}\) *SWB/SU/A267/B9*, 1 January 1992.


To reinforce his authoritarian style of leadership and to legitimise his rule in the initial phase, Karimov issued a number of decrees aimed at curtailing the freedom of press, restraining the activities of opposition etc. In early 1992 Karimov made some institutional changes in the structure of government. The post of Hakim (governor) was created at a special session of the Supreme Soviet on 4 January 1992. According to the provision of law, the hakims were to be appointed and removed by President with decisions confirmed by Oblast level councils. In a similar move, the region level hakims were to be appointed and removed by Oblast hakims. In July 1992, parliament provided for the withdrawal of the authority of a People’s Deputy, if the deputy was charged with ‘anti-constitutional actions aimed at undermining the state structure’.54 These measures were aimed at checkmating each and every move of the President’s opponents.

In the initial phase an attempt was made not only to regulate the activities of legislative and executive branches of government, but also to remove potential opponents of Karimov. One such example was the removal of Mirsaidov. Although Shukhrullo Mirsaidov played a key role in the selection of Karimov as First Secretary of Soviet Uzbekistan, but in course of time differences cropped up between the two powerful leaders. After his election as President, Karimov abolished the post of Vice President, which Mirsaidov occupied. He was humiliated and entrusted with the lesser known post of State Secretary. Thus Karimov clipped the wings of his potential rivals in order to consolidate his

position. He further accused Mirsaidov with nepotism and favouritism and also failure to carry out governmental projects. On 23 June 1992, the latter was sentenced to three years of prison but was “pardoned” by Karimov.55

Despite these stern measures which aimed at subverting the opposition, Karimov regime faced many insurmountable challenges from various arena of society in the initial phase. The problems of transition from being a republic of Soviet Union to an independent state put great strains on Uzbek society, coupled with transition from a command economic system to market oriented economic system that put lots of hardships on the local people in terms of skyrocketed price of food grains and non-availability of essential commodities. Due to rise in prices of food products, students failed to receive the food coupons. This led to an upsurge with large scale participation of students in the demonstrations against the authority. It started on 16th January 1992 and protest against the government lasted for four days demanding Karimov’s resignation. The violent clashes which took place between demonstrators and security forces led to death of two students.56

As has been mentioned by Rajan Menon and Jack Spruyt, the ruling elite might highlight differences and controversies with other republics, perhaps even resort to war to justify increase in state capacities as a means of social mobilization. This can be seen in the case of Uzbekistan. The Tajik Civil war provided an opportunity to Karimov to stifle the opposition. Uzbekistan shares a lot with

56 Dillip Hiro, op.cit, p. 177.
Tajikistan and large number of Tajik population residing in Uzbekistan, which is around 9,34,000.\textsuperscript{57} The Uzbek President thought that the Tajik civil war might further aggravate the existing ethnic, social and other problems in Uzbekistan. This apprehension led to further suppression of dissidents, banning all types of demonstrations and arresting and harassing political leaders. On 28 May 1992, Birlik Chairman Abdulrahim Pulatov was physically assaulted by plain clothed police with metal rods as he emerged from an interrogation at the Procuracy building in Tashkent.\textsuperscript{58} Karimov justified such crackdown and censorship of opposition on the plea of ‘resuscitating democracy’. In a speech at Supreme Soviet he addressed, it is necessary to straighten out the brains of one hundred people in order to preserve the lives of thousands.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{The Period of Consolidation}

The second phase of Consolidation began in Uzbekistan when the Constitution of Uzbekistan was adopted and some attempts were made in the direction of democratisation. President Karimov devised policies as well as implemented various programmes in order to gain political mileage inside the country, to gain international recognition for his regime, to get aids and grants from various international organisations and above all to gain admission into various international forums like Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe.


\textsuperscript{58} William Fierman, “Political Development in Uzbekistan”, op.cit, p. 385.

\textsuperscript{59} “Straightening Out Of The Brains Of One Thousand: Discriminatory Political Dismissal in Uzbekistan”, Helsinki Watch 5, No. 7, (April 1993), p. 2. At the same time however, the regime consistently denied responsibility for any beatings, see for example Pravda Vostok, 18 July 1992, cited in ibid, p. 383.
(OSCE), the IMF and the World Bank, etc. USA, the only superpower in the world after the demise of Soviet Union laid down five conditions for establishing diplomatic relations with the constituent members of CIS\textsuperscript{60}. The conditions which Washington laid down were:

- Acceptance of all US-USSR agreements;
- respect for human rights;
- a free market;
- democratic elections;
- A functioning multi-party system.

So to gain international acceptance the ruling regime curtailed its oppressive measures. The Constitution of Uzbekistan, which was adopted on 8 December 1992, proves this fact. Uzbekistan was the second Central Asian republic after Turkmenistan to adopt a new constitution.

Article 2 of the Constitution expresses that Uzbekistan’s laws are the will of the people and serve its interests. State agencies and officials are responsible and accountable to the society and citizens. Article 7 of the Constitution prescribes that the people are the only and constant source of state power. State power in the Republic of Uzbekistan is exercised in the interests of the people and only by agencies authorised to do so by the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and legislation adopted on the basis of Constitution. Article 11 of the

\textsuperscript{60} Dillip Hiro, op.cit, p. 178.
Constitution provides for separation of power into legislative, executive and judiciary branches. Article 2 of the Constitution proclaims that right to life is an inalienable right of every person and infringement of this right is a very serious and punishable crime. Article 29 provides that each person has the right to freedom of thought, speech and belief. Each person has the right to seek, receive and disseminate any information, with the exception of information directed against the existing constitutional order and other limitations established by law.

Article 32 of the Constitution provides that the citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan have the right to participate in the management of the affairs of the society and the state both directly and through their representatives. The participation is effected through self-government, referendum and the democratic formation of state agencies. Under Article 34, the people of Uzbekistan have the right to associate in trade unions, political parties and other social associations as well as to participate in popular movements. Articles 43 to 46 guarantee rights and freedoms of the person.

A close analysis of above provisions of the Constitution throws light on the fact that it is democratic and the provisions of the Constitution are closely similar to other democratic countries of world like India, USA, France and other West European countries.

Thus, it should be noted that although practically no attempt was made to democratise the country, an effort was made only formally in the direction of

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62 Ibid.
democratizing the country. This is evident from the fact that there has been no respite to the suppressions launched by Karimov. In Uzbekistan, during mid-1993, a new regulation came out which aimed at restricting the freedom of press which called for re-registration of all newspapers and periodicals. This aimed at regulating those newspaper and periodicals which put government in an embarrassing situation. As a result of these regulations, only newspapers and periodicals published under the authority of government got opportunity to register themselves.

In the political field, the Karimov regime issued a decree for all public organisations through a cabinet resolution and political parties officially registered in Uzbekistan were told to re-register or face suspension. As a result of this Peoples Democratic Party got itself registered. Another political party, Progress of Homeland Party, which was founded in May 1992, registered itself. It was founded by Usman Azim, a former Birlik member. He left Birlik and formed this youth organisation. The social basis of the party is largely drawn from the business community. Birlik could not succeed in its efforts to become a political party as the Ministry of Justice did not accept the application submitted by it, while Erk refused to submit papers claiming that the decree was unconstitutional.63

Amidst this chaotic political scenario the government decided to hold the parliamentary elections. It began when a supplementary law was passed 'on the

63 William Fierman, “Political Development in Uzbekistan”, op.cit, p. 389.
elections to *Oly Majlis* of the republic of Uzbekistan. And in May 1994, a related law on elections to Oblast, raion, city and town councils was promulgated.

On September 1994, elections to *Oly Majlis* were announced. It was to be held in December 1994. Articles 76 to 88 of the constitution deal with *Oly Majlis*. Article 77 of the constitution declares it as the highest legislative organ of Uzbekistan. Under Article-78 *Oly Majlis* exercises exclusive jurisdiction over adopting, amending and adding to the constitution of the republic of Uzbekistan; determining the directions of domestic and foreign policy; scheduling elections for the parliament of the republic of Uzbekistan and local representative agencies. Article 79 of the constitution provides that a session of parliament is competent if no less than 2/3 of the total number of deputies participated in that session. The tenure of parliament is fixed for five years.

Despite the provisions enshrined in the constitution, a number of amendments have been made. For example, the Article 77 of the constitution was amended in September 1994 and the strength of the legislature was increased from 150 to 250.

Similarly the changes in the election laws led to complete subversion of democratic polity, as a result of which the elections can be completely controlled by government and through this law the government got an opportunity to allow only the desired parties to contest elections and in this way legalised the dominance of one party system. A thorough study of function of
parliament during this period also showed that it acted more as an instrument of the President than an independent organ of the constitution.

In an article titled ‘Towards Clarity’ Muhammed Salih pointed out certain basic flaws in the democratic constitution of the country. He argued that ‘in order to build a democratic state, enacting a democratic constitution is not enough. Uzbekistan’s people have a democratic constitution, but this constitution cannot improve the lot of Uzbekistan’s people. The leadership rules over the will of the people, not the laws of the constitution’.\(^6^4\) Efforts were also made to suppress the deregistered political party, Erk. Around 40 persons along with Muhammed Salih were charged with plotting to overthrow the government through a coup d’etat. Salih fled from the country and took refuge in Turkey, where he made efforts to enlist support of a number of influential persons in Uzbekistan, who were common enemies of Karimov. Salih enlisted support of Muhammed Sadyk, tried to revive his newspaper and disseminate information on Uzbekistan.\(^6^5\) The 16\(^{th}\) session of the Olliy Majlis on 22 September 1994 ratified the law on elections to the new legislative organ of the republic, the Olliy Majlis and fixed the date of elections.\(^6^6\) All the political parties who were registered prior to adoption of the September law were allowed to contest the December 1994 elections.\(^6^7\) Moreover, the names of the candidates were to be proposed by the heads of local administrations, that is, by Karimov’s direct appointees.\(^6^8\)

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\(^6^4\) FBIS-USR-94-034, 6 April 1994.
\(^6^5\) FBIS-USR-94-110, 11 October 1994, p. 84.
\(^6^6\) Ibid, p. 87.
\(^6^7\) FBIS-USR-94-14 January 1994, p.88.
\(^6^8\) FBIS-USR-94-110, 11 October 1994, p. 87.
As a result of the above provisions, two political parties got the opportunity to contest the elections to parliament. The Peoples Democratic Party, the legal successor to the Communist Party headed by the President himself and Vatan Tarakkiyati (Progress of the Fatherland) Party, which was created by President Karimov to show that real democracy and multiparty system exist in Uzbekistan.

A close study of the election manifesto of Progress of the Fatherland Party shows that it never attacked its opposition the Peoples Democratic Party. The party described itself as a child of independence and outlined its programme to create a law governed state, though it also stood for rapid de-nationalisation.69

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in its second extra session in Tashkent outlined its programmes and nominated candidates to the Olly Majlis. The PDP in comparison to Progress of the Fatherland Party has 5,000 members is the largest political party claiming 3, 74,535 members with 12,000 primary organisations. It has branches not only in urban residential areas but also in Kolkhozes, Sovkozes, plants and factories.70

Under Article 11 of the law of elections, parliamentary elections were held on 25 December 1994. In fact this was the first parliamentary election in post-Soviet period in Uzbekistan. Political parties and local authorities nominated 634 candidates to be elected for the 250 post of deputy of Olly Majlis.

243 candidates from the Peoples Democratic Party, 141 candidates from the Progress of the Fatherland Party and 250 candidates from local representative

bodies contested. In the elections in 139 constituencies more than three candidates competed. In 106 constituencies more than two candidates were in the fray and only in five constituencies only one candidate contested. More than 93 percent of all eligible voters participated in the elections. In 39 constituencies in which more than three candidates stood, none of them secured majority votes cast. As a result of this under Article 43 of the laws on election, a re-polling was held on 8 January 1995. Similarly, in six constituencies where two candidates contested, no one of got majority, for which re-polling was held on 22 January 1995.71

The final election results showed that 69 deputies were elected from the People’s Democratic Party, 14 from Progress of the Fatherland Party and 167 deputies were nominated by the local councils. However, 124 members of the ‘non-affiliated’ regional blocs were also members of the Popular Democratic Party, giving the party a much higher de facto count of 193 seats (77.2 percent of the Olly Majlis).72

It is to be noted that despite tangible progress in the direction of holding parliamentary elections, Uzbekistan political scene is basically dominated by one party and Vatan Tarakkiyeti has basically reconciled itself to playing a second fiddle to PDP. As Abdurahim Pulatov, the Chairman of Birlik party, pointed out that exactly one thirds of the candidates were khokims, head of local administration making the legislature quite amenable to presidential influences.

The results could also be predicted in advance in places where candidates who were representative of the higher echelon of power and managers of large enterprises were nominated. Candidates from ‘Vatan Tarrkiyetti’ whom no one knew did not have any chance of ending up in parliament, if the authorities had not ‘ensured’ the election of candidates of this party. The first parliamentary election of independent Uzbekistan marked the end of second phase of democratic development of Uzbekistan. This stage provided some, through limited impetus to the growth of democratic development in the country.

Period of Development

The third stage of political process since independence in Uzbekistan's can be rightly referred to as the era of ‘democratic development’. After holding parliamentary election in December 1994, Karimov tried to strengthen his own political clout by influencing the legislature through various means like non-existence of any credible opposition groups in parliament (Olly Majlis). Karimov endeavoured to strengthen his own position vis-à-vis the parliament taking advantage of the non-existence of any credible opposition that can challenge the authoritarian tendencies of the President. In his inaugural address at the opening of the new session of Olly Majlis in Tashkent, the first of its kind after the holding of parliamentary elections, he argued, ‘the time has come to draw up and implement a long term, comprehensive programme in Uzbekistan at the beginning of a new century.’ He also argued further that democratic institutions should reflect the mentality and character of the people. ‘It is known
that the western pattern of democracy is based on the philosophy of individualism and excessive politicisation of the masses. On the other hand the Eastern concept of democracy is based on the sanguinary principles of collectivism, paternalism and pre-eminence of public opinion'. He also further urged, ‘the multi-party principle should also be introduced into the work of Supreme Assembly. I think it is necessary to legalise the activity of party factions...to make a noteworthy contribution to the administration of the state’. 73

Despite his address where he pointed out to the need for the existence of multi-party democracy and for evolving a democratic concept in the East, practically nothing has been done for the furtherance of the process in Uzbekistan’s politics. To garner greater legitimacy to his regime in the eyes of general public and international community and to show that real ingredients of democracy exist in Uzbekistan, Karimov created three new political parties namely, National Revival Democratic Party, the Halq Birligi (Peoples Union Party) and Adolat Spudz. These parties acted as handmaid of Karimov instead of acting independently. All three have pledged their support to the Karimov leadership and 47 of the regionally sponsored legislators have reportedly joined the Adolat Spudz.74

The leader of the Adolot (justice) Jurabayev declared that, the major objective of the party is to help the Uzbek President Islam Karimov in his effort ‘to carry out

74 Roger Kangas, op.cit, OMRI, Annual Survey, 1995, p. 278.
economic and political reforms', adding that the party would base itself on 'the human ideas which every religion bears in itself'. The statement given by Jurabayev demonstrates the true nature of Uzbek political parties nurtured by Karimov.

In an effort to legitimise his rule in Uzbekistan, Karimov also undertook certain legal means. Under Article 90 of the constitution, the same person may be elected as President of Uzbekistan for not more than two consecutive terms. To bypass the above article, Uzbekistan President decided to extend his terms of office rather than contest elections. Because, if he contests the elections, he could contest the next elections scheduled to be held in 2000. So, by a calculative move, Karimov decided to extend his terms of office. The new Parliament which met on 24 February 1995, decided to extend the terms of office of President till 2000 through a referendum. The reason cited for extending the terms of office of President, as Erkin Khalilov, the Parliament Chairman pointed out, was “ensuring the consistency of the reforms which are being carried out in the republic”. 238 out of the 247 members backed the proposal. This shows that despite presence of opposition parties in parliament no body opposed that vote; it also reflects the true nature of opposition and the democratic polity in Uzbekistan. Accordingly, the referendum, which was held on March 1995, showed that 99.4 percent out of 99.6 percent of the electorate reported to have participated, approved the referendum for extending the term of office of President Karimov.

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75 SWB/SU/2235/G/8, 23 February 1995.
76 SWB/SU/2239/G/4, 28 February 1995.
The referendum paved the way for Uzbek President Karimov’s desire to further strengthen his position in Uzbekistan’s politics. Under his rein he appointed his close confidants as regional governors as an initial step. Clause 12 of Article 93 of the constitution gave the President power, with subsequent approval from the corresponding council of people’s deputies, to appoint and dismiss from office the governor (Khokims) of regions and of Tashkent City. As he did not face any problem in the Council of Peoples’ Deputies, he reshuffled the governors according to his whims. He appointed his cohorts as regional governors to avoid any formidable challenge from regional governors. This policy of appointing governors closely resembled the system of patron-client relationship, which is an essential ingredient of Third World democracy of which Uzbekistan of course is a part. He axed khokims of Kashkadarya, Samarkand and Navoi regions, due to “failure on their part to improve work conditions and their inability in paying salaries to the employees”. This was a part of his strategy to appoint his loyal men in the post of Khokims (governor) in the important regions of the country in place of difficult ones.

However, in the human rights front, some efforts were made by Karimov to improve the human right image of his country. The post of Human Rights Commissioner was created on the proposal of the Uzbek President. Karimov himself admitted that certain excesses were committed in the initial post-independence phase. He also mentioned that ‘political reforms must be founded on economic reforms, so we admit that political reforms are lagging behind
economic reforms in Uzbekistan’. Uzbekistan got a pat in the back when the then US Defence Secretary praised President Islam Karimov and projected Uzbekistan as an ‘island of stability’.  

Several institutional mechanisms were also put in place by Islam Karimov to protect and promote human rights. The National Centre of Human Rights of Uzbekistan was created through a presidential decree on 31 October 1996. The main objective of the centre was to co-ordinate research and educational activities of state and social agencies in the field of human rights, development of the concept of human rights. Another institution that came up was the institution for monitoring the existing legislations under the Oily Majlis of the republic. It was established in December 1996 with the purpose of further deepening democratic reforms, bringing the legislation of Uzbekistan at par with international norms, maintaining, monitoring and exercising effective control of observing legal norms in the sphere of human rights.  

Before his official visit to the United States and Europe in June 1996, the government registered an NGO, the Committee to Protect Personal Rights. The Ministry Of Justice registered this NGO within four days of the submission of its application. But this was the same organisation which the government had refused registration for three months. In September 1996, a Conference of the Human Right Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) was organised in Tashkent with

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78 SWB/SU/2273/G/1, 8 April 1995.  
79 Uzbekistan 10 years of Independence, Embassy of Uzbekistan, New Delhi, India, July 2001, pp. 3-4.

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the permission of the government in which 70 pro-democratic activists participated. At a Human Rights Seminar sponsored by OSCE about twenty activists, including opposition activists, were allowed to participate in the conference. In September and October 1997, pro-democratic groups held two meetings in Tashkent. The first meeting was the founding conference of the independent human right organisations of Uzbekistan and the second was by Erk members. Even Uzbek dissident Abdurmannov Polat who was exiled for a long time was allowed to enter the country. Like former Soviet leaders and following Soviet-traditions, Karimov brought out a book named ‘Uzbekistan on the threshold of the 21st Century’. In this book he put forward his visions for Uzbekistan at the dawn of 21st century. He gave his own notion of democracy and pointed out that the quality of democracy is not determined by the growing number of parties. ‘It is not important to create an acceptable political space for those political parties those really may express and defend the interests of broad social layers’. The formation of parties, their number, specific programmes, goals etc should be defined through the concentration and accumulation of social interests. He also pointed out that there are at least three effective criteria to define the degree of democracy in a society, to what extent the public is informed about decision making process; to what extent the government decisions are under the control of public; and to what extent ordinary citizens take part in state management. The democratic culture of transition period as

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compared to those of the developmental period has witnessed a marked improvement. This could be due to international pressures, or growing dissidence or emergence of a new breed of politicians in the political horizon, providing a thrust to the democratic development process in the country.  

Another significant step which Islam Karimov took was to resign from the Peoples Democratic Party leadership. Karimov justified his actions by stating that only a non-partisan head of state could act as a genuine guarantor of the country's constitution and respect for human rights. This act of Karimov closely resembles the delegative model of democracy given by Gullerman O'Donnell. A delegative model of democracy is one which meets the formal requirements of democracy but whose actual practice resembles the features of an authoritarian state. It is grounded on the basic premise: the elected President is entitled to govern the country as he sees fit with little or no regard to other institutions that may try to check or limit his power. Typically, Presidents in delegative democracy present themselves as being above all parties and politics and as saviour of the nation. So by resigning from PDP Karimov wanted to free himself from any narrow party politics and at the same time acted like an astute statesman. Despite the improved liberal atmosphere that prevailed in Uzbekistan in the post-1995 phase, the dominance of Karimov in Uzbek politics can be judged from the fact that he reshuffled the government at will. He

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82 William Fierman, “Political Development in Uzbekistan” op.cit, p. 400.
replaced Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Water Resources blaming them for country's poor harvest and cotton production. The new law on political parties enacted in January 1997 further strengthened his position and supremacy in Uzbek politics. In January 1997, a draconian law on political parties was passed to put more stringent conditions on regulating the activities of political parties. In December 1998 a new party was formed named as *Fidokorlar* (National Democratic Party) and it was registered in January 1999 by the Ministry of Justice. The social basis of its membership consists of engineers, middle and small scale businessmen, intellectuals and younger people from different regions.

This party was created with the blessing of President Karimov and Erkin Norbutaev was the General Secretary of the party. The main objective of the *Fidokorlar* party was to 'unite self sacrificing, young and energetic people with progressive views who consider destiny of their fatherland their own destiny; are able to undertake responsibility for the country's future and struggle for the people's happiness, democracy and justice'. The creation of parties and norms on human rights improved the situation somewhat in Uzbekistan in comparison to earlier years. But *Birlik* party leaders criticised the Karimov government and even called for outside helps to overthrow the dictatorial regime.

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86 SWB/SU/3359/G/1, 20 May 1999.
The Uzbek parliament which met on 20 August 2000 decided to hold the next presidential and parliamentary elections. It also abolished the five percent margin for party blocs and all five political parties were to get an opportunity to contest elections.\(^{87}\) In a significant departure President Karimov also emphasised on the importance of free and fair elections and argued for elections on multi-party basis.

The Chief Election Commission laid down certain prerequisites for the candidates in the elections to parliament in the month of October 2000. Some tough measures were also taken to check the number of candidates like 25-year age limit, and restrictions against working in any religious organisation as experts, or holding the post of Imam and other such leading positions in religious organisations.\(^{88}\) This qualification was basically laid down to impede the growth of fundamentalist elements who by this rule would not be able to contest election. Besides, other qualifications were also laid down restricting candidates in parliamentary elections.

In comparison to the 1994 parliamentary elections where only two parties were allowed to contest the elections, the Central Election Commission, in accordance with Article 21 of the law on elections to the supreme assembly of the republic of Uzbekistan, decided to allow Peoples Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, (PDPU), Adolat Social Democratic Party, Vatan Taraqqiyati (Progress of the Fatherland Party), Fidokorlar (self-sacrificers) Party, and Milliy Tikalanish (National Revival Party of Uzbekistan) to contest the ensuing elections to the

\(^{87}\text{SWB/SU/3620/G/3. 23 August 1999.}\)
\(^{88}\text{Ibid, G/4.}\)
parliament. In the 5 December election about 93.46 percent of voters participated in the elections to elect 250 members to Oily Majlis. The election result announced by the CEC showed that candidates nominated by the local authorities rather than political parties won the majority of the seats. Of the 184 seats out of 250 seats, which was declared in the first phase of election, 32 went to Peoples Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, the reincarnation of the former Communist Party, 19 to Fidokorlar Party, Adolot Social Democratic Party secured 9 seats, Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party secured 19 representative and Vatan Taraqqiyati (Progress of the Fatherland Party) secured six seats 98 representatives of local authorities and 11 representatives of initiative group of voters were elected. The second phase election was held on 19 December 1999.

Table- II

Final Results of General Election, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties etc.</th>
<th>Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidokorlar National Democratic Party</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progress of the Fatherland</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolat Social Democratic Party of Uzbekistan</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens' Groups</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local council nominees*</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The overwhelming majority of Local Council nominees were members of the PDPU.


3982, op.cit.

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89 Ibid.
90 SWB/SU/3717/G/2, 14 December 1999.
Regarding the process of election, the Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission Najmiddin Komilov noted that elections were held on democratic principles, candidates were nominated from different parties and initiatives groups and stood in accordance with the laws on elections. Thus, he said the democratic election process was developed in Uzbekistan. Even international observers like OSCE headed by Madeline Wilken said that, 'they had assessed all aspects of the election campaign and elections and pointed out, “there have been many improvements in the legislative structure since the first independent election in 1994. We are pleased to note that first steps towards democracy had been taken during the years of independence”‘.91 Dmitry Ryurikov, the Russian ambassador to Uzbekistan said the election was held in an organised manner, in a calm atmosphere and without serious flaws. But, the opposition led by Chairman of Birlik’s Peoples Movement of Uzbekistan, Abdurahim Polatov pointed out, “we do not consider these elections true elections and their results will not bring anything positive to Uzbekistan. I think the elections will aggravate the situation, further deepening Uzbekistan’s present political and economic crisis”.92

Despite some allegations of electoral irregularities in the parliamentary elections, efforts were made in the direction of democratisation with participation of five parties in the parliamentary elections and attendance of international observers and their appreciation of elections. It is explicitly clear

91 Ibid, p. 3.
92 SWB/SUI/3713/GI/2, 9 December 1999.

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that the five parties which contested the elections are created with the blessing of Karimov. One also keep in mind the fact that the concept of political parties is quite new to the political culture of Uzbekistan and was not there even in pre-Soviet and Soviet times.

The process of democratisation was pepped up by the presidential election held in January 2000. The Central Election Commission in a meeting on 28 August 1999 authorized all five parties to participate in the elections. A strange development took place in nominating presidential nominee. Instead of nominating their own candidate, political parties like Adolot Party, Watan Taraqqioti (Progress of the Fatherland Party), Millity Tiklanish (National Revival Party) nominated Karimov for the post of President. PDP, the largest political party in Uzbekistan, nominated Abdulhafiz Jalolov as its presidential nominee.\footnote{SWB/SU/3645/G/3, 14 October 1999.} But Islam Karimov contested the election as a nominee of Fidokorlar Party (Self-Sacrificers). In his election speeches he made an impassioned plea before the people to vote for him in order to ensure progress, prosperity and freedom of the people, to secure a comfortable life for people. Unlike Karimov, Jalalov never uttered a single word against his opposition candidate Karimov and talked more about spiritualism.\footnote{Devendra Kaushik, op.cit, Eurasian Studies, 2001, p. 9.}

The Election to the post of President was held on 9 January 2000, and nearly 92.57 percent of the population took part. The result came out on 10 January 2000, President Karimov received 11,147,621 votes, nearly 91.9 percent of the
total votes and his competitor Abduhafiz Jalalov received 505, 161 votes or 4.17% of the total votes.\textsuperscript{95}

The election witnessed the full participation of the people. The Foreign observers appreciated this and observed that no election rules were violated. It was summed up that the opposition candidate Abdulahfiz Jalalov was not a strong opposition candidate and his election campaign was never directed against Karimov and real opposition parties like \textit{Birlik} were dissuaded to participate in the election.

After his election Karimov strongly criticised PDPU in a session of the parliament. He said that actions not words were needed and that 'the party needed to stop acting hostile and carelessly and take a long term view. He also pointed out that 'the Peoples Democratic Party’ with its superior numbers should not assume itself as a dominant party; a party’s ideology and influence is more important than the numbers.\textsuperscript{96}

In the political sphere, the two political parties \textit{Fidokorlar} (Self-Sacrificer) Party of Uzbekistan and of the Fatherland Progress Party decided to merge and it got approved by the congress of two parties. The united party was called \textit{Fidokorlar National Democratic Party of Uzbekistan}.\textsuperscript{97}

Addressing the sixth-session of Uzbek parliament \textit{Oily Majlis} held on 29-30 August 2001, Karimov outlined the future road map that included the supremacy

\textsuperscript{95} SWB/SU/3734/G/1, 11 January 2000.
\textsuperscript{96} SWB/SU/3765/G/3, 16 February 2000.
\textsuperscript{97} SWB/SU/3817/G/7, 17 April 2000.
of the law, enhancing the protection of the rights and interests of an individual, family, society and state, upgrading the social, cultural and legal awareness of the people.  

In recent years to further strengthen his position in Uzbekistan politics, Karimov embarked upon political reforms. The first such step was holding of referendum to extend his presidential terms of office on 27 January 2002 from existing five years to seven years. The referendum also envisaged for making a bi-cameral parliament with a professional lower chamber and an upper house representing regions of the country. 91.58 percent of the total electorate participated in the referendum, out of which 93.65 percent electorate approved the creation of a bi-cameral legislature while, 91.78 percent of the electorate approved the proposal to extend the terms of office of the President, while 8.22 percent voted against that proposal.

Many critics of President believe that this was an attempt on part of Karimov to become President for life. They argue that in a similar move, President Nazarbayev also extended his terms from five years to seven years. In fact, not only he extended his term of office from five to seven years but also a law was passed which allowed the President to maintain certain policy prerogative and a seat on the National Security Council after he leaves office. Although, the Uzbekistan referendum has not made any such provision, but many consider it

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as a stepping stone for making the office of President for life. It should be noted that, this is third such attempt on changing presidential term of office. While under earlier constitutional provision, a person cannot hold the post of President more than two times. To bypass this provision, the presidential election as scheduled to be held in 1995, was not held, and he got an extended term. The election to the post of President was held in 2000 which gave him the second term. But his term was extended from five years to seven years. The formation of bi-cameral legislature with professional lower chamber and an upper house representing regions of the country is however a bold move in the direction of democratisation. A professional lower chamber can certainly bring efficiency in policy direction with their vast experience. But, how much this can put Uzbekistan in its path towards democratisation, time will only tell.

**Mohalla and Regional-Clan Politics in Post-Independence Phase**

Another essential feature of Uzbek politics is the existence of regional clan politics that played a key role during the Soviet period. It could not simply wither away in the post independence phase. Unlike other Central Asian republics not only clan but regional differences play an important role in Uzbekistan. The major regional differences as in Soviet period also exist in the post-independence phase. The five regions that play prominent role in Uzbek politics are: 1) Ferghana Valley, 2) Tashkent oasis, 3) Samark and Dzhizak and Bukhara area, 4) Kashka-Darya and Surkhan-Darya area, 5) Khorezm oasis. These five regional entities were divided according to the administrative-territorial division of the country. They have their own historical and cultural
heritage and each is different from the other in certain respects. Since modern politics is a game of regulation, the regional politics in Uzbekistan is closely related to the ‘pluralistic model’ of democracy.

The pluralistic view of democracy is staunchly advocated by Robert A. Dahl and D. B. Truman the two foremost champions of pluralistic democracy. They point out that power is non-hierarchically and competitively arranged. It is an inextricable part of an endless process of bargaining between numerous groups representing different interests since power is essentially disseminated throughout society and since there is plurality of pressure points, a variety of competing policy formulating and decision-making centres arise.\textsuperscript{101} The Uzbek regional politics can be analysed in relation to the pluralistic model. Since power is highly dispersed in society each group adopt various means to dominate over other groups and in this fashion seek to capture political power. In the Soviet period the Tashkent clans dominated Soviet Uzbekistan politics. Since its independence the Uzbek politics has been dominated by Samarkand elite which have been able to check the dominance of Tashkent clans. The smouldering hostility between Samarkand and Tashkent clans came to surface in October 1991 shortly after Uzbekistan declared independence. About 200 deputies of the Supreme Soviet criticised the policies of Karimov towards his preference for a particular regional lobby. All these deputies came from Tashkent and were representatives of state bodies. It has been pointed out that, the Mirsaidov, the

\textsuperscript{101} David Held, op.cit, pp. 189-190.
then Vice-President of Uzbekistan who is a native of Tashkent gave support to the actions of Supreme Soviet members.\textsuperscript{102} The importance of clan politics was also reflected in the 1991 presidential election. The opponent of President Karimov, Muhammed Salih, who is a \textit{Khorezm} on expatriate, got an overwhelming support from \textit{Khorezm}.\textsuperscript{103} After his election as President, Islam Karimov removed Mirsaidov from the vice President post and put him in an insignificant position. He was also charged with corruption and sentenced to imprisonment, but got presidential pardon. Vice-premier Mukhammedzhan Kara and Anatolie Voznenko, mayor of Tashkent were removed from their respective posts. The Chairman of the parliament Shovkat Yuldas was removed. In January 1994, news paper \textit{Samarkandsky Vestnik} published an article of Uktam Bekmuhamedov, a former active member of the civil rights movement and the leader of the Tajik society of Samarkand, under the title, ‘I admit my errors’. He wrote, among other things, ‘one has to discard illusions which are far from aspirations. We must effectively support the President of Uzbekistan and contribute to the construction of a law abiding, democratic state and the reforms which are unswervingly implemented under his firm guidance’.\textsuperscript{104} The statement of Bekmuhamedov shows that to protect the person from their own regional clan, they even compromise with their ideology.

\textsuperscript{102} A. Chebotaev, op.cit, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{103} Shahram Akbarzadeh, “The Political Shape of Central Asia”, \textit{Central Asian Survey}, 16(4) 1997, p. 520.
Although Karimov gave overemphasis to Samarkand clan, but he tried to maintain some balance and harmony between various clans in order to maintain regional stability, an essential condition in nation-building process of a country. In the present Uzbek politics, President Islam Karimov, first Vice Premier Dzhurabekov, Advisor to the President on national security B. Guliamov, Minister of Finance Kharidov belong to Samarkand-Bukhara clan. Utkur Sultan who belongs to the Tashkent clan occupies the post of the Prime Minister. His role in Uzbekistan’s politics is nominal and does not enjoy any effective power. Another Tashkent clan member who occupies an important role is Abdulaziz Komilov, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This shows that like other Third World countries, the role of traditional social structure has remained prominent in Uzbekistan, though it has changed its role and structure coping with the changing time and in accordance with modernization process. The traditional social structure put emphasis on ethnicity, patron-client relationship and so called primordial loyalty. These features are opposed to the system rational legal bureaucracy advocated by Max Weber. The concept of patron-client relationship owes its origin to politics oriented to anthropology. It means mutual personal exchange of goods and services between unequal actors. In a wider political context it means, politicians and officials offer favourable treatment to businessmen and large land owners on the one hand and significant voting groups on the other hand and they receive economic and political support in return. 105

The Uzbek society like other Central Asian republics had no experience of
democratic political participation. The political process operated through the
principle of patron-client relationship. The *khanates* were governed by khans
where leadership was hereditary. The *Ulemas* were important players in
sanctifying khans and directing the population to obey the rule.\(^\text{106}\) The
reinforcement of these traditional institutions that can be seen in Uzbekistan
through several institutions, like *aksaqali* (house of elders) is important
indications of continuing existence of traditional relationships. Another
important social structure of Uzbekistan politics is the existence of
*Mahalla* (neighbourhood), which organises and regulates the social, economic
and political activity of individuals in a society. It emphasises the principles of
collectivism, communal life and welfare of all people. This is reflected in the
ideology and the organisation of political and social socio-cultural life of
modern Uzbekistan which is in contrast to western notion of individuality.

Apart from *Mahalla*, the other important factor which contributed to the growth
of authoritarianism as Karl Wittfoogel argued that the demands that emerged
from the necessity for a centrally managed irrigation system produced socio-
political organizations, which he characterised as ‘hydraulic society’.\(^\text{107}\) He
argued that unlike the individualistic political culture that was developed in
many water rich agrarian societies, semi-arid agricultural societies often
required a high level of centralised decision making. The demand of the

\(^{106}\) Shahram Akbarzadeh, “Political Shape of Central Asia”, op.cit, p. 527.

'hydraulic society' resulted in the emergence 'managerial state', the economic, administrative and political function of which were concentrated in a ruling class consisting of landowners, land managers and the military. The same thing can be applicable to Uzbekistan. The nomadic people settled in a particular area where there were large water resources. This led to the growth of *Mohalla* and important role of community and this in turn led to people's deference to their leader. A person's well being comes to be closely related to the wellbeing of his family, society and clan. Nobody questions the decision of elders. Everybody acts according to the wishes of the elders. Although Karimov is not much old, but people pay respect to him as their saviour. In fact, he is considered as a modern day Khan, which has resulted in the growth of a personalised authoritarian system where western principles of democracy are difficult to apply.

To sum up, there have been since independence three phases of democratisation, i.e. period of transition, period of consolidation and period of development. Substantial progress towards democratisation has been made in Uzbekistan under Karimov's rule in the post-independence phase. In the first-phase, President Karimov dominated the political life of Uzbekistan. The chaos and uncertainty that followed after the disintegration of Uzbekistan also to some extent contributed to the growth of authoritarian modernisation process. The second phase of democratisation which is also known as period of consolidation provided opportunity to Karimov to build certain institutional structures in order to facilitate democratisation process. Institutional structures like constitution and
holding of parliamentary elections provided the basis for democratic development. The third period which is also known as period of development provided real opportunity for the democratic development of the country. A number of political parties appeared, Human Rights Commission was established, and presidential and parliamentary elections were conducted in free and fair manner in comparison to earlier elections.

Although Uzbekistan's democracy has made relative progress, there are also numerous violations of human rights. And individual is completely subordinated to the state and society. One, however, should not be too pessimistic, because, a decade is too early to predict success or failure of a democracy in a country like Uzbekistan. The collective modernisation process that is adopted by Islam Karimov, and which Uzbekistan inherited through its Mohalla System, closely resembles Japanese model of modernisation, where the society counts and not individual efforts. But collective efforts of society led to amazing growth of Japan in technical and economic sphere. Similar situation in Uzbekistan looks far off though attainable. But Uzbekistan’s nascent democracy first has to meet the challenges arising out of the fragile ethnic relations, rise of Islamic fundamentalism and chaotic economic situation etc.