

Consolidated moods of the Kazakhstanis after the detention of activists Asiya Tulesova and Beibarys Tolymbekov are the sign of the people’s great demand for a change in the situation, according to experts.

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Photo: azattyq.org

On April 21, on the largest marathon day in Almaty, two young men took to the streets with a banner, which read “You cannot run from the truth [in Russian] [#adilsailayushin](#) [#УМЕНЯЕСТЬВЫБОР](#)»[I have a choice]. Soon, police officers detained Asiya Tulesova and Beibarys Tolymbekov, and the court sentenced them to 15 days in jail for violating the peaceful assembly rule.

The participants of such protests and even journalists, who covered them, were detained earlier. However, this case of Tulesova and Tolymbekov captured the attention of many

social media users of Kazakhstan for the first time and united people together around the idea of free elections.

Civil activist and one of the founders of AUA app that monitors air in Almaty, and of information website auagroup.kz, **Asiya Tulesova**, stated in the appeal court that she was trying to draw people's attention to the forthcoming early presidential election in Kazakhstan announced for June 9.

"I think this is an important moment in the life of every Kazakhstani citizen. We might finally hold honest, fair elections. But, unfortunately, our system is designed in such a way that it does not allow real candidates, ordinary citizens, to have the opportunity to announce their candidacy in the presidential race," said Tulesova in court.



Asiya Tulesova and Beibarys Tolymbekov. Photo: Timur Nusimbekov

It's a reminder that on March 19 the first president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, resigned after almost 30 years in power. Chair of the senate Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, who took presidential office, made a statement live about the early presidential election to be held in two months, on June 9.

So far, the following candidates announced their intention to run for president: the incumbent leader of the country Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev of Nur Otan Party, Sadybek Tugel of Uly Dala Kyrandary, Toleutai Rakhimbekov of Auyl Party, and chair of Ak Zhol Party, deputy of Mazhilis, Daniya Yespayeva.

See also: [Power Transition in Kazakstan](#)

Tulesova and Beibarys Tolymbekov urged people to hold honest independent elections.

"I consider what is happening now to be a crime — not my crime before the state, but the state's crime against me as a citizen of Kazakhstan, given that we have a Constitution that gives us freedoms, such as the freedom of speech. We need to unite together and hold fair, independent elections. Any elections - for the President of Kazakhstan, for judges, and, of course, for akims," she said.

She said she didn't give up the idea of civic activism and wanted the community to unite together around this idea.



Suinbike Suleimanova. Photo: Timur Nusimbekov

In addition to the participants of this campaign, operators Suinbike Suleimanova, Aigul and Aidos Nurbolatovs were also detained. It emerged later that they were also detained on April 21, but were released after questioning.

Operators acted as witnesses in a trial of Tulesova and Tolymbekov. However, the next day they were called again and their status was changed to offender, and they were brought to court. As the police officers explained, their status was changed due to their acquaintance with Asiya Tulesova.

All the three were fined at the rate of 20 monthly calculation indices (130 dollars). Suinbike Suleimanova was given a 30 per cent discount because of pregnancy. However, she and other detained participants had been kept without water and food a day earlier.

#отправдынеубежишь [you can't run from the truth]

The story went viral in social media of Kazakhstan. Users started publishing posts using hashtags **#отправдынеубежишь** [you can't run from the truth] to support young activists.

"One person flash mob in support of fair and honest elections".

"I couldn't stop crying when I saw hot mother and daughter saying goodbye after the trial... what for?"

[#казахстан](#) [#отправдынеубежишь](#) Ася Тулесова взорвала Казнет своим баннером во время [#almatymarathon2019](#) Зная эту девушку, я бы и подумать не мог, что у неё тоже накопело. Все люди Казахстана бегут от правды, а она бежит ей навстречу.

— Ицхак Соломонов (@isuleimenov171) [22 апреля 2019 г.](#)

"Asiya Tulesova got viral on Kaznet with her banner during #almatymarathon2019".

На Украине актёр стал президентом.

У нас же, пока, сажают тех кто хочет честных

выборов. [#уменяествьвыбор](#) [#отправдынеубежишь](#) pic.twitter.com/UwVpZcZMJ

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— Sam Nugmanov (@samnugmanov) [22 апреля 2019 г.](#)

“In the meantime, we detain those who stand for honest elections”.

There were calls to hold a protest. However, the youth organisation held a meeting in the Almaty theatre, where they discussed the forthcoming elections. They noted that since 1991 the statutory rules became more and more stringent and don't leave any chance to independent candidates to participate in elections. For example, a person must have 5 years of civil service experience in order to have a right to run for president of Kazakhstan.

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Начинаем дискуссию «Adil sailay ushin». Мест в зале больше нет. Смотрите прямой эфир @misk_kz.

Публикация от [MISK_KZ \(@misk_kz\)](#) 23 Апр 2019 в 12:31 PDT

Political analyst and activist of the “For the interior ministry reform” movement, **Dimash Alzhanov**, also said that Kazakhstan needed large-scale reforms:

“In the last 20 years, the system has strongly consolidated in favour of the authoritarian government and tightened the screws. The right of citizens to free speech is being restricted. In this situation, we need complex reforms.”

According to him, it’s not only the constitution that needs to be changed, but also the law-enforcement system as “the police is politicised and used as a repressive machine.” The election system and laws that restrict right to peaceful assemblies and freedom of expression should also be changed.

Longing for liberalisation

This consolidation of protest moods is an uncommon thing for Kazakhstan. Young people started printing t-shirts with slogans [#уменьяестъвыбор](#)[I have a choice]. They urge young people to become observers during elections and participate actively in them.



Sultanbek Sultangaliev. Photo: ia-centr.ru

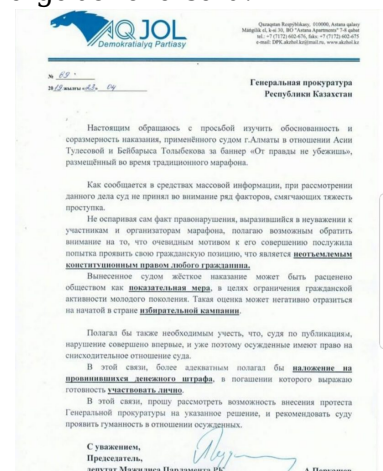
According to political analyst **Sultanbek Sultangaliev**, the activists used a harmless slogan during the marathon, which was just a rephrased statement of the president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, about the need for honest elections. However, the events that followed showed that the society longed for liberalisation of laws:

“You cannot tighten the screws for ever as you risk breaking them and causing a senseless and deadly riot. The authorities represented by the law-enforcement bodies and the judiciary pull the tiger’s whiskers and create a wave of public protest out of nothing.”

In addition to activists, the lawyer of activists, **Zhanar Balgabekova**, was also punished. She is known for protecting other Kazakhstan-based activists. The Almaty city court issued a personal ruling against her, it’s a kind of a reprimand, which can lead to the revocation of her lawyer’s licence.

“They [the authorities] fear when smart, thoughtful people express their opinion. Especially, young people, who are not so easily scared. But if the authorities keep imposing bans, it could end up badly,” Balgabekova said.

The Ak Zhol democratic party joined in the campaign. Its chair and deputy of Mazhilis, Azat Peruashev, wrote a letter to the General Prosecutor Office of Kazakhstan in support of the activists. He



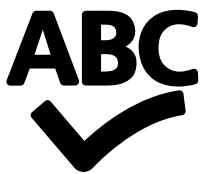
thinks that an attempted civic stance was an obvious motive of the offence on the marathon day and suggested a fine as a penalty and said he was willing to pay it personally.

His party fellow and public activist **Duman Kapasov** also shares his opinion about humanisation. He thinks public consciousness is changing in Kazakhstan and more people get involved in public processes despite the lack of an established dialogue with the authorities.

“Things should be discussed both online and offline with active citizens and feedback should be given. A dialogue is not enough, it should be promoted vertically at all positions,” Kapasov said.

However, according to Sultangaliev, the reaction of the authorities shows only “repressiveness and mindlessness of the machinery, which can instantly destruct new formats of interaction between the authorities and the public.”

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