

Today the world speaks about negative, already felt and expected, consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile, the situation has positive sides, yet incommensurable.

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### Rise of textile industry

The coronavirus pandemic has turned out beneficial not only to the producers and distributors of pharmaceutical products, it has become an unexpected impetus for the development of textile industry of Kazakhstan. A severe shortage of masks has made producers increase the overall production of masks, not only medical ones. Many regions of the country started to make face masks of gauze, cotton fabrics, knitted fabrics.









*Photo courtesy of the akimat of Shymkent*

The process is very active in Shymkent. 25 per cent of the total consumer goods enterprises are located here. A few textile enterprises that used to produce bed linen, school uniform, suits, coveralls, etc. started to produce facemasks.

According to the akimat of Shymkent, only one plant, Gaukhar, can produce 500 thousand masks a day. By the way, [according](#) to the deputy prime minister, Yeraly Tugzhanov, who participated in an online briefing on March 20, the short-term task is to increase the volume of mask production up to 1 million masks a day.

On March 21, during the visit to the operations centre for emergency coordination and monitoring, the president of Kazakhstan Kassym Zhomart-Tokayev [demanded](#) that the population should be provided with masks and emphasised it was an urgent and operative task for the government.

The mass production of masks, in turn, caused high demand for the produce of the local

cotton plant, AZALA Textile. According to the [website](#) of Shymkent akimat, the plant that processes 500 tonnes of cotton a month and produces 1.5 million metres of fabric now takes orders of sewing rooms in Shymkent, Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Karaganda and Aktau.

Meanwhile, last autumn this enterprise was complaining about the lack of orders. Other representatives of the light industry have reported many times in recent years the lack of orders, crisis of plants and the industry, their inability to compete with cheap imports.

Deputy director of the Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Shymkent **Daniyar Darmen** suggests that current demand for masks has a good impact on the further development of the textile industry. Besides, it will cause the development and growth of other auxiliary industries that are necessary for textile fabrication.



*Daniyar Darmen. Photo: atameken.kz*

“Previously, our chamber developed 60 niche projects for small and medium businesses intended for import substitution, including many projects of production of goods required for textile fabrication. For example, trimmings, zip fasteners, buttons, etc. These are the niches that can now be occupied by local producers,” Darmen said.

### **A chance to increase import substitution**

In general, according to Daniyar Darmen, closure of borders, difficulties in goods importation, shortage of imported raw materials and accessories make us think that Kazakhstan cannot depend on external supplies. It means that we need to start our own businesses.

In his comment to CABAR.asia, independent expert-economist **Nurbek Achilov** said that closure of borders is a favourable situation for the development of the national industry.

“The demand for safe and quality foodstuff, Kazakhstan agricultural produce and processed goods is growing. Therefore, this is a good chance for our agrarians to use our land resources and the national capacities in this sphere,” the expert said.

The chair of board of the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, Ablay

Myrzakhmetov, during the [live broadcasting](#) on his Facebook account noted that the agricultural sector and food industry are the essential sectors of import substitution in the state of emergency. According to him, the Chamber will be actively working with the government in this regard.



*Photo courtesy of Dmitry Shishkin. Facebook*

Retailers confirm the significant growth in basic goods demand and the increase in their supplies, respectively. PR manager of the largest retail network in Kazakhstan, Magnum Company, **Dmitry Shishkin**, said the demand for cereals, spaghetti, sugar, flour, etc. has increased 3-4 times due to the panic buying in stores, and for canned goods – two times.

However, according to Shishkin, almost all socially important goods are produced in Kazakhstan and only sugar is imported.

“As China is closed now, our supplier, the trade and distributor company MCC Trade Company, has found new suppliers, mainly, in Uzbekistan,” he said.

According to the information that became available by the time of publication, the anti-crisis measures taken by Kazakhstan and voiced by the president of Kazakhstan include the increase of own produce on the shelves of stores and market outlets. On March 24, minister of information and public development Dauren Abaev [said](#) during the briefing that they selected 258 projects for 1 trillion tenge (2.2. billion dollars) for import substitution.

## **Total digitalisation**

Online study has become a new reality not only for students since March 16, but also for schoolchildren. The last term for schoolchildren begins on April 6, and it will become the first ever experience of distance education for Kazakhstani schoolchildren.

Earlier, prime minister of education and science of Kazakhstan Askhat Aimagambetov on his Facebook [account](#) wrote that the distance education for the Kazakh system of education is a great challenge.

He admitted that it is not an easy process to have 100 per cent of educational institutions shift to distance learning, which is not the same as the online education. However, he

emphasised that the ministry takes relevant measures and has already settled the matter of secondary education.



Photo: azertag.az

The shift to distance education, the state of emergency, quarantine in two cities, shift of some organisations and companies to remote work has made almost all spheres of life and activity work in online mode. Delivery of goods, food, provision of public services, reporting, and also cultural events - concerts, performances, first nights, excursions, etc. - have become online.

The Zerde national info communications holding has [posted](#) a selection of online services for any case: from delivery of food and medicines to remote work and obtainment of public services. It has available solutions for the people and businesses, and the list of services is going to increase.

The current period can be expected to contribute to the significant growth of the digital literacy of people. The benefits of using online services will become obvious for those people who preferred offline services for a variety of reasons.

It is obvious that offline work of the majority of Kazakhstanis will expand its scope as the

employers will also feel the benefits of such mode of work. Moreover, the IT market today offers a lot of ready digital solutions and tools of effective remote team management.

### **“Quarantine” staff**

In addition to the obvious shortage of medical staff during the pandemic, there is a great demand for the staff of stores, couriers, seamstresses. The number of vacancies for these occupations stands in stark contrast to mass leaves and dismissals of employees in the majority of spheres.

Dmitry Shishkin confirmed that their stores have greater demand for employees.

“This is true for Almaty and Nur-Sultan as they have restrictions on movements of people as many of our employees are from the suburbs. The most relevant issue for us is the working hands because we need people to unload and place our goods due to the growth in the supplies,” the PR manager said.

Employment websites are full of advertisements seeking couriers and sellers. On March 24, the website [hh.kz](http://hh.kz) had 267 vacancies of sellers. However, couriers are most needed. Thus, [qyzmet.kz](http://qyzmet.kz) contained 292 vacancies of couriers, and [kz.jooble.org](http://kz.jooble.org) - 561, [rabotanur.kz](http://rabotanur.kz) - 150.

### **For oneself and for all**

The internet is full of advices and recommendations on how to spend the quarantine time with profit and pleasure. This is a good time for reading books, watching films and cultural education, studying foreign languages, mastering new skills and competencies.

Finally, it is a rare moment for spending time together with family and relatives.

Protect yourself and others from getting sick

**Wash your hands**

- after coughing or sneezing
- when caring for the sick
- before, during and after you prepare food
- before eating
- after toilet use
- when hands are visibly dirty
- after handling animals or animal waste



World Health Organization

WHO coronavirus disease advice for the public

The recommendations of medical workers on the need to follow good hygiene – wash hands with soap when one gets home and after using bathrooms – distributed via all channels amid the panic fear of infection become a regular norm. They seem to become a useful habit. They will help not only to prevent coronavirus, but also will decrease the rate of other infections.

Despite all the shocks – decline of tenge rate, oil prices – the current situation can make the economy of Kazakhstan seek and develop new opportunities and sectors, according to economist Nurbek Achilov. Also, it will give a chance to focus on the spheres that will be in constant demand and to reduce dependence on raw materials.

Besides, according to the expert, this stage will make the globalisation process more understandable. Not only in terms of further development, but also in terms of risks posed for the global community and global economy.

“The states need to look at these issues in a new way and to take relevant measures to avoid such situations in future. Also, they need to revise all health norms to respond to the situations like the coronavirus pandemic in a more effective way,” Achilov said.

The president of Kazakhstan Kassym Zhomart-Tokayev at the meeting of the emergency state commission on March 23 [said](#) the situation was ambiguous.



Photo courtesy of Nurbek Achilov. Facebook

“Every crisis has two sides. On the one hand, it poses a serious threat, on the other hand, it opens new possibilities. [...] The purpose we have is to use these possibilities as much as possible to show signs of recovery and to become even stronger,” Tokayev said.

*This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change – from the Borderland to the Steppes Project.*



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