

## **India-Kyrgyzstan Relations: Future Prospects and Challenges**

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Central Asia today is of great strategic importance to many countries, and will continue to hold that position in the coming years. In the context of international relations, it is a natural, historically formed buffer zone, and one of the most convenient routes of transit. Further, the region is rich in minerals, especially hydrocarbons. On the downside, it is currently the hub of Islamic extremism. The region's vast potential to compete with existing mineral markets is yet to be exploited.

Likewise for India, Central Asia is important in not merely a civilisational or historical sense, but a geopolitical and economic sense as well. Given the Kashmir issue, it is not feasible for India to be oblivious to political developments in this region. For instance, Pakistan in the North-West continues to be hostile towards India, and it is believed that Pakistan is sponsoring cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. India's national security then lies in peace and stability in the Central Asian region. Tragically though, the region is troubled with religious extremism and terrorism.

Despite its foreign policy goals, both short-term and long-term, India has been under-involved with Central Asian countries. To India, these countries offer great opportunities, which if utilized can help India realize its energy ambitions, especially in the oil and gas sectors. Presently, energy security is a major concern for many nations, including India, and the Central Asian countries, especially Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, are the most promising energy source in the world today. It is for this reason that the importance for this region can no longer be downplayed (Roy, 2009).

Historically, India has had close relations with Kyrgyzstan, which was one of the few Central Asian countries to be part of the Ancient Silk Route. Even much later during the Soviet era, India and Kyrgyzstan had political, economic and cultural contacts, although limited. On one occasion in 1985, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Bishkek and Issyk Kul lake.

When Kyrgyz Republic became independent on 31st August, 1991, India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the nation in 1992, and even set up the resident Mission of India in 1994 (India-Kyrgyzstan Relations, 2013). In modern times, both countries share concerns on terrorism, extremism and drug-trafficking.

Since 1992, India and Kyrgyzstan have been parties to several international framework agreements pertaining to culture, trade and economic cooperation, civil aviation, investment promotion and protection, and avoidance of double taxation, to name a few. On a more institutional level, foreign office consultations have played a significant role in facilitating greater understanding of views on bilateral and international issues concerning the two nations (India-Kyrgyzstan Relations, 2013).

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