

India-Central Asia Relations in Modi Regime

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INTRODUCTION

Each and every nation relies on one another to fulfill their interests and to meet their demands of goods and services. No nation is isolated politically and economically. This cooperation calls for framing of foreign policies to establish the diplomatic ties with other nations. Such cooperation requires that relations be maintained with the international organization and non-governmental actors (Ahmed, Jesmine, 2020: 787).

Foreign policy allows the platform for discussion and negotiation on the political, social, economic and military fronts with the other nations (Khara, Nabin Kumar, 2018: 105). Foreign policy has been defined differently by various scholars. Joseph Frankel puts it as decisions and actions involving relations between one state and others. Whereas, Padelford and Lincoln, describe a state's foreign policy, a resultant of the courses of action in order to achieve its objectives and interests. The two main functions of foreign policy are the attainment of conceived goals and putting forth the national interest (Bojang, 2018:2).

Many scholars agree on the fact that foreign policy serves as an area where domestic and international politics cross over and the political environment of the state determines or influences it to a large extent. In some cases, international factors play a major role, whereas in some, domestic developments are more important. *Realist theory* proposes an opposite view on foreign policy and it stresses on the anarchical characteristic of the international environment as an important determinant (Khara, Nabin Kumar, 2018: 109)

India's foreign policy, under Prime Minister Modi,

has seen active engagement on economic and diplomatic front with majority of nations. India's vision has been to foster the internal growth and establish its strong hold in the international arena. Prime Minister Modi has envisioned, that India's leadership in capacity building of human capital, strengthening the democracy, aspirations, success in various fields will anchor the growth of the region and global. Economic and political rise of Indian will lead to the regional and global prosperity along with stability. Foreign Secretary has emphasized on India's willingness to take up more responsibilities and seek possibilities of rebuilding cooperation and broadening contacts (Ministry of External Affairs India, 2017).

India-Central Asia relation has a long history from the time of "Silk route". The two regions share culture, religion, trade, and commerce with each other since time immemorial. These relations has further strengthen during medieval ages during the Mughal and Islamic rule as most of the strings of those were originated in Central Asia. Soviet Union used to have good relations with India and Central Asia was part of it and even in post -Soviet era relations are maintained (Jha, Martand, 2016). All the five Central Asian states (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan Kazakhstan) gained independence in 1991 after USSR disintegration in an unstable political environment. Their main challenge was to replace the system dictated by the Soviet Republic with a new one and handle the economic collapse resulting from the collapse of USSR. The race for natural resources and economic control pushed the area into an international political battleground. Militarization of Afghanistan on the pretext of "War on Terror" by the United States enhanced their geopolitical significance

(Kothari, Raj Kumar, 2018).

India's bilateral relations with Central Asian countries covers a vast sector like, pharmaceuticals, textiles, metals, chemicals, petroleum etc. Russia, China and the United States are establishing their political stronghold on this landlocked area. Developing powers like Turkey, Iran and Pakistan have a direct influence over this region, which makes it difficult for New Delhi to exert its influence. India's emerging export industries offers a solution to this problem. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan emerged as largest beneficiaries under the ITEC (India Technical and Economic Cooperation), wherein India offers human resource development training. These countries harbor energy in the form of oil and gas and India needs a reliable access to these resources. Central Asian countries also seek economic ties in the field of agro-techniques and food production. This make Indian policies very much relevant for the Central Asia. Soon after coming to power Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister, visited the all Central Asian Countries to re-energize India's engagement with CARs (Central Asian Regions). This tour brought India back into the consciousness of Central Asia. After this, the recurring visits were organized on building connectivity, export-import, anti-terrorism and cyber security. At present, regional cooperation is the main agenda of India's policies towards Central Asia (Vivekanand International Foundation, 2020).

During PM Modi's visit in 2015 India and CARs have envisioned the common goal of acting as bridge between South and Central Asia. It has also been envisioned to prevent Afghanistan from becoming the hub of extremism and terrorism and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan collaborated with India for Joint Working Group on counter-terrorism (Roy, Mina Singh and Rajorshi Roy, 2017). Recently, on 13th January 2019, five Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan and India participated in the Central Asian Dialogue in Samarkand, Uzbekistan to discuss connectivity options and stabilize Afghanistan. Second Central Asian Dialogue was held in 2020 to discuss strategic engagement. India is enhancing the military cooperation with the Central Asian nations by deploying a large number of defense attachments in Central Asia to boost military and security cooperation. India imparts military training to Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek cadets. India has conducted first of its military exercise in Uzbekistan along with counter terrorism pact and security cooperation

agreement. India is also conducting military exercises with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Khanjar Series) (Marjani, Niranjana, 2020).

With permanent membership in SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) in 2017, India's "Connect Central Asia Policy" has gained impetus. Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railways is advisable to promote idea of exporting Indian goods to Russia and Europe (Izimov, Ruslan and *et al.* 2019: 52). Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) at Tashkent under SCO, provided more cooperation to combat extremism and terrorism (Vivekanand International Foundation, 2020). India-Central Asian Business Council has been launched in 2020 to leverage the opportunities in energy, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, agro-processing, education, urban-infrastructure, transport, civil aviation, IT and tourism and promote trade which now stands at USD 2 billion per annum (Reddy, Sangita, 2020).

Challenges for India in Central Asia:

China has captured major investment share in Central Asia through its economic growth at unprecedented rate. In order to address and counter this, India formulated its "Connect Central Asia Policy" to enhance ties in political, security, economic and cultural area (Jha, Martand, 2016). In order to address the issue of connectivity, India started the development of Chabahar Port in Iran and also entered into Ashgabat agreement and International North-South Transport corridor (INSTC) (Marjani, Niranjana, 2020).

Way forward:

India has to build the India-Central Asia Forum Summit alike India-African Forum Summit. India's IT industry is developing at an extra ordinary rate and India may establish IT hub in Uzbekistan for promoting the software exports in Central Asia which will subsequently open the route for Russian markets India can promote exports of software to Central Asia using Uzbekistan as hub. This would help India gain access in Russian markets. India seeks to rejuvenate age old silk route through a "Virtual Silk Route" to trade in innovation and technologies. Central Asia's climate change induced challenges call for India's expertise in combating such problems. India's tourism and medical tourism also offers a promising venue to strengthen regional ties and cooperation. For this, media could play an important role in advertising and creating awareness in Central Asia

(Vivekanand International Foundation, 2020). India and Kazakhstan can jointly promote pharmaceutical enterprises in the region by construction of hospitals, clinics and medical centers (Izimov, Ruslan and *et al.*, 2019:49).

Conclusion :

India Central Asian share strong cultural values but due to influence of neighboring countries like Pakistan and China, the connectivity is a major issue. India was the first country to recognize post-Soviet independence of these nations. CARs share common stands with India on the issues of national security, energy, market, environment, multi-polar world order, UN reforms and cooperation. During PM Modi's regime, India has strengthened the connectivity in route, technological cooperation, counter-terrorism efforts and trade for mutual cooperation and development.

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