

Air corridors

February 27, 2020

Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: Air corridors and open lanes of communication are a key strategy to boost ties, people to people and trade, and also promote peace and prosperity in the region. It is a starting point for even more deepening partnership with other countries.

In news: India is planning to set up “air corridors” between India and five Central Asian nations.

Placing it in syllabus: India and Central Asia

Static dimensions: What are Air Corridors?

Current dimensions:

- What is their need with Central Asia?
- Hurdles

Content:

What are Air Corridors?

- Air corridors are established to **remove transit barriers and encourage export promotion** that is critical for economic development of regions.
- They **include regular cargo flights with special clearing and customs facilities** to expedite the movement of goods, especially fresh fruit and other agricultural produce.
- The **first air corridor of India** was established with **Afghanistan in 2017**.
- Now India is exploring ways to set up **“air corridors” with five Central Asian nations** – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

What is their need with Central Asia?

- The idea was mooted at the recently held “**India Central Asia Business Council**” (set up by the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)).
- The council has decided to **establish four working groups** including on energy, agro and food processing, tourism and pharmaceuticals to further boost trade.
- While flying time from Delhi for most of the Central Asian destinations is two hours, it may take **two months for containers sent overland from India to reach these places.**
- A **lack of “overland connectivity”** (reference to barriers to transit trade through Pakistan) has kept the **total trade between India and Central Asia approximately low at \$2 billion per year.**
- Availability of air corridors can help in **transporting goods, especially perishable ones, efficiently and swiftly.**
- **Tourism, medical tourism and higher education** are the other sectors that have tremendous potential for collaboration between India and the Central Asian countries.

Hurdles:

- At present, most of the trade between Central Asia goes via Bandar Abbas in Iran, northern Europe or China. Though the government has been seeking to develop more direct routes from Chabahar, conceptualising the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and becoming a part of the Ashgabat Agreement, the **rail-link between Chabahar and the crossover into Afghanistan is yet to be developed.**
- **Without considerable progress on infrastructure** on the ground, promotion of trade with Central Asia is a daunting task.
- **Visa procedures need to be streamlined** further in order

to grow services, including medical tourism and education.