

India- Central Asia Dialogue

November 2, 2020

As developing countries, India and Central Asian nations share common perspectives on opportunities and challenges. With the new dialogue in place, both sides have enough chances to leverage the opportunities to promote growth in the region.

In news: 2nd India- Central Asia Dialogue Virtual meet was held.

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign affairs

Static dimensions

1. History of the Dialogue
2. India's interests in Central Asia
3. India- Central Asia Relations

Current dimensions

1. In news

Content:

In news:

- India recently held the 2nd meeting of the India-Central Asia Dialogue between itself and five other central Asian countries.
- Afghanistan was present during the video conference as a special guest.
- The foreign ministers of all the above-mentioned countries discussed ways in which they could increase connectivity between their nations, as well as several other key issues.
- They shared a 'commonality' of views in domestic and international issues.

Outcomes:

- **India unveiled a \$1 billion line of credit for Central Asian countries** which were to be used in developmental projects such as connectivity, energy, IT, healthcare, education, agriculture and etc.
- All the countries reaffirmed their commitment to fight against the plague of terrorism by destroying terrorist safe havens and networks.
- All Foreign Ministers underlined the need for every country to ensure that their territory is not used to launch terrorist attacks against other countries.
- There was also emphasis on reinvigorating trade and commerce partnerships by overcoming the lack of overland connectivity barrier.
- There was establishment of working groups by India Central Asia Business Council comprising apex Chambers of all participating countries on identified priority areas.
- All Ministers called for **settlement of the Afghan conflict** on the basis of *Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process*.
- Need to continue close cooperation between the Sanitary and Epidemiological Services of India and the Central Asian countries in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic was emphasised.
- India offered to provide **grant assistance for implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP)** for furthering socio-economic development in the countries of the region.
- The launch of the **India-Central Asia Business Council (ICABC)** was welcomed.
- Thrust was given to further develop the transit and transport potential of their countries, improving the logistics network of the region and promoting joint initiatives to create regional and international transport corridors.
- The importance of humanitarian, cultural, educational and tourism cooperation between India and the Central

Asian countries was emphasized.

History of the Dialogue:

- India-Central Asia Dialogue is a **ministerial-level dialogue** between *India and the Central Asian countries namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.*
- All five nations became independent states after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, post-Cold war.
- The first India-Central Asia Dialogue in was held in Samarkand, Republic of Uzbekistan.



- The dialogue focuses on a number of **issues including ways to improve connectivity and stabilise war-ravaged Afghanistan.**
- In the first dialogue, India proposed setting up of **'India-Central Asia Development Group'** to take forward development partnership between India and Central Asian countries.
- All the countries participating in the dialogue, except for Turkmenistan, are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

India's interests in Central Asia:

- Central Asia has been called "**the global chessboard**".
- Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, most CARs continued to remain autocratic following their independence.

- India chose to take the 'constructivist' approach which is concretely manifested in its **'Connect Central Asia' policy**.
- The policy, launched in 2012, aimed to enhance India's political, economic, historical and cultural connections with Central Asia.
- Central Asian countries are rich in **hydrocarbon resources and are considered vital for diversifying India's domestic energy mix**.
- As the planned TAPI gas pipeline which could have helped meet the energy needs of South Asia was stalled since 2006, India announced its plans to invest in **Chabahar port** in the Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran in 2003.
- Most of CARs countries' leaders view India's Chabahar port as **an opportunity to diversify their export markets and control the ambitions of China**.
- These CARs nations have admitted New Delhi into the **Ashgabat Agreement**, which allows India to use the existing land connectivity networks to facilitate trade and commercial interactions with both Central Asia and Eurasia and also access the natural resources of the region.
- The CAR has placed the Eurasian region firmly in New Delhi's zone of interest.
- A direct access to CAR will help India to not only establish itself as one of the major players in the region but also **undermine China's much-hyped BRI flagship projects**.

India- Central Asia relations in general:

- India and Central Asia share ancient historical and cultural linkages.
- Ancient kingdoms like the **Kushan Empire** had territory in parts of both regions.
- These contacts were further strengthened in the medieval ages with the advent of Islam and later with the

establishment of Muslim rule in India, many of whose rulers had their origins in Central Asia.

- Central Asia is considered as **India's 'extended neighbourhood'**.
- A shared common geography has facilitated continuous exchange of people, ideas and goods in both directions.
- The "**people-to-people**" **contact** has been a defining feature of India's Connect Central Asia Policy. A large number of students from India and the Central Asian countries study in each other's higher educational institutions.
- Central Asia is strategically positioned as an access point between Europe and Asia and offers extensive potential for trade, investment, and growth.
- Central Asia enables India to expand its footprints in the resource-rich region amid an ongoing standoff with China and to fight terror effectively, including in Afghanistan.
- Economic cooperation between India and the CARs plays an important role in developing strong defense ties, by strengthening strategic and security cooperation with a strong focus on military training.
- Due to the landlocked nature of Central Asian states, there is no direct sea route between India and the region. Hence talks have been going on the issue of working jointly to reactivate the international north-south transport corridor.
- India is working to invest in the region in the IT and education sectors.
- India is planning to set up a **Central Asian e-network** linking all five Central Asian states with its hub in India to provide tele-education and telemedicine connectivity.
- CA is making efforts for internal regional integration and a "silk visa" has been proposed to allow tourists to visit all countries in the region with a single visa.
- In 2016, some CA countries (e.g. Uzbekistan) signed

trilateral transit-and- trade corridor agreements with India, Iran and Afghanistan by which **Chabahar port** would be **linked** to Zaranj in Afghanistan, which could then connect to the **Zaranj– Delaram Road**, constructed by India and finally to **Afghanistan's Garland Highway**.

Mould your thought:

1. Connect Central Asia policy is a manifestation of India's soft power. Explain.

Approach to the answer:

- Write about the recent dialogue
- Write the history of India-CAR relations
- Explain the strategic importance of CAR to India
- Conclusion