



Visit of Defence Minister of Kazakhstan

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Why in News

Recently, the **Defence Minister of India** held bilateral talks with the Defence Minister of the Republic of **Kazakhstan** in **New Delhi**.

The two Ministers had last met in Moscow (Russia) in September 2020 on the sidelines of **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** Defence Ministers' meeting.

Key Points

- **Highlights of the Talks:**

- Agreed that both sides must look at the possibility of **defence industrial collaboration** of mutual interest.
- Exchanged views to **further strengthen bilateral defence cooperation**, including through training, defence exercises and capacity building.
- Kazakhstan thanked India for the opportunity given to the Kazakh troops for deployment as part of the Indian battalion in the **United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)**.

UNIFIL was established by the UN Security Council in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area.

- Assessed the **annual joint military exercise KAZIND**.

- **Indo-Kazakh Defence Cooperation:**

- It is carried out under the framework of an agreement on '**Defence and Military Technical Cooperation**' signed in July 2015 during the visit of Indian Prime Minister to Kazakhstan.
- The agreement includes conduct of joint training, **exercises, military-technical cooperation, UN peacekeeping and exchange of intelligence**.

Kazakh Armed Forces Unit underwent training on peacekeeping operations in India in April-May 2018 for deployment under the **command of an Indian Battalion at UNIFIL, Lebanon**.

- **Significance of Kazakhstan to India:**

- There are **three factors** which make Kazakhstan important for India. First, its **geo-strategic location**; second, its **economic potential**, especially in terms of energy resources; and third, its **multi-ethnic and secular structure**.
- **Kazakhstan's geo-political existence between Russia and Asia**, along with long borders with China, makes it a country of great strategic importance.
Kazakhstan lies to the northeast of the Caspian Sea, bordered by the Russian Federation to the north, China to the east, and Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the south.
- Kazakhstan **can also help India achieve a geostrategic rebalancing with China**. India's foremost objective is countering the rapid economic inroads China is making in the region through the **One Belt One Road (OBOR)** initiative.
 - India seeks to achieve this with the competing **North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC)**.
 - NSTC is a **multi-modal transportation** established on **12th September 2000** in **St. Petersburg, by Iran, Russia and India** for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation among the Member States. It has been expanded to include eleven new members.
- Kazakhstan has become **one of the key activists in the field of global nuclear security**, and has achieved a number of results in peacekeeping policies and the resolution of conflicts around **Nagorno-Karabakh, Iran, Ukraine and Syria**.



India - Kazakhstan Relations

- **Historical:**

- Relations between India and Kazakhstan are ancient and historical going back to more than 2000 years.
- There has been a constant and regular flow of trade in goods and, more importantly, exchange of ideas and cultural influences.

The **flow of Buddhism from India to Central Asia and Sufi ideas from Central Asia to India** are two such examples.

- **Political Relations:**
 - India was **one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kazakhstan. Diplomatic relations** were established in **February 1992**.
 - India and Kazakhstan have been **strategic partners since 2009**.
- **Cooperation at Multilateral Fora:**
 - India and Kazakhstan actively cooperate under the aegis of Multilateral Fora including **CICA, SCO and the UN organizations**.
 - India has been a consistent supporter of Kazakhstan's initiative on **Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)** and is actively participating in the process.
 - Kazakhstan supports India's permanent membership in an expanded **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** and has extended its support for India's non-permanent membership in 2021-22.
- **Trade and Economy:**
 - The **India-Kazakhstan Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC)** established in 1993 is the **apex bilateral institutional mechanism** for developing trade, economic, scientific, technological, industrial and cultural cooperation between the two countries.
 - The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on the Indian side and Ministry of Energy on the Kazakh side are the nodal ministries with respective Ministers as the Co-Chair of the Commission.
 - Several **Joint Working Groups (JWGs)** have been established in the areas of Counter Terrorism, Trade & Economic Cooperation, Defence & Military Technical Cooperation, Information Technology, Hydrocarbons, Textiles, Tea Debt and Space Cooperation, Health and Transport, Connectivity & Logistics to take forward bilateral relations in the respective spheres.
 - Kazakhstan is **India's largest trade and investment partner in Central Asia**.
- **Space Cooperation:**
 - **Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** launched "**Al-Farabi-1**", a 1.7 kg Technology Demonstrator Nano Satellite built by Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty along with 103 other satellites in 2017.
 - A delegation from ISRO attended **Kazakh Defence Expo 'KADEX'** in May 2018.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:**

Kazakhstan **supported India in obtaining India-specific exemption** to allow civil nuclear cooperation with **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** countries in 2008.
- **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC):**

India provides capacity building assistance to Kazakhstan in various specialized fields under **ITEC program** sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs.

- **Consular:**

- India and Kazakhstan have **an agreement on visa free entry for Diplomatic and Official Passport holders.**
- Since February 2018, **Indian has extended e-visa facility** to Kazakh citizens.
- Kazakhstan has also introduced **electronic visa facilities for travelers from India** with effect from 1st January 2019.

Way Forward

- Being part of central Asia, Kazakhstan is strategically important for India. India needs to use its instrument of economic leverages more efficiently to build closer ties with Central Asia.
- At its core, the heightened India-Kazakhstan relationship allows New Delhi to bypass Pakistan and the highly unstable Afghanistan to reach a resource-rich Nur-Sultan, complementing India's developing economy.

Source: PIB