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Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Border Tension

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Why in News

Recently, a **ceasefire on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan** appeared to be holding after a day of intense **fighting between the two countries** that has killed about 40 people and wounded about 175.

Kyrgyzstan and **Tajikistan** belong to the central asia region. Other countries of the region are Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.



Key Points

- **Background:**
 - Both nations have **claimed the area around the water supply facility in Kok-Tash, a dispute dating back decades** to when they were both part of the **Soviet Union**.
 - The current configuration of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is the **product of Soviet mapmakers** drawing the dividing lines for Soviet republics, after the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) collapsed in late 1991**.
 - The meandering boundary between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is particularly tense as over a third of its **1,000-km length is disputed**. **Restrictions on access to land and water** that communities regard as theirs have often **led to deadly clashes in the past**.
- **International Response:**

Russia and **European Union** (EU) welcomed the ceasefire deal and emphasised the **need for a lasting and peaceful solution**.
- **Importance of Central Asia for India:**
 - **Political:**
 - India has a very wide array of interests in Central Asia covering **security, energy, economic opportunities etc**.
 - Security, stability and prosperity of Central Asia is **imperative for peace and economic development of India**.
 - Central Asia serves as a **land bridge between Asia and Europe, making it geopolitically axial for India**.
 - Both **India and Central Asian Republics (CARs)** share many **commonalities and perceptions** on various regional and world issues and can play a crucial role in providing regional stability.
 - **Economic:**
 - The region is **rich in natural resources** such as petroleum, natural gas, antimony, aluminum, gold, silver, coal and uranium which **can be best utilized by Indian energy requirements**.
 - Central Asia has **huge cultivable areas lying barren** and without being put to any productive use, offering enormous opportunity for cultivation of pulses.
 - CARs are fast getting linked to the global market for production, supplies of raw materials and services. They are also increasingly getting integrated into the **East-West Trans-Eurasian transit economic corridors**.

- **Indian Initiatives:**

- India intends **expansion of International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

It will act as a vital gateway to access Eurasian markets and optimally operationalize its use, requiring a Central Asian state joining the project as a direct stakeholder.

- **India-Central Asia Dialogue:**

- India has proposed setting up of 'India-Central Asia Development Group' to take forward development partnership between India & Central Asian countries.
- This group will help India to expand its footprints in the resource-rich region amid China's massive inroads and to fight terror effectively, including in Afghanistan.

India-Kyrgyzstan

- **Political:**

- India has enjoyed **strong bilateral ties with Kyrgyzstan since 1991.**
- India was **one of the first countries to establish diplomatic ties with Kyrgyzstan in 1992.**

- **Culture & Economic:**

Since 1992, the two countries have many agreements, including on Culture, Trade and Economic Cooperation, Civil Aviation, Investment Promotion and Protection, Avoidance of Double Taxation, Consular Convention etc.

- **Military:**

In 2011, the joint '**Khanjar**' series of exercises was started.

- **Indian Diaspora:**

In Kyrgyzstan, about **9,000 Indian students** are studying medicine in various medical institutions in the country. Also, **there are many businessmen living in Kyrgyzstan** who are involved in trade and several other services there.

- **Strategic:**

- The Kyrgyz leaderships have been **largely supportive of India's stand on Kashmir.**
- They also support India's bid for a permanent seat at the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC).**

India-Tajikistan

- **Political:**
 - India and Tajikistan elevated bilateral relations to the level of a **Strategic Partnership in 2012.**
 - Tajikistan supported India's membership to the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** and also permanent membership of an expanded UNSC.
 - India supported Tajikistan's accession to the **World Trade Organization** in 2013.
- Culture & Economic:
 - Trade between two sides is **not to expectations despite efforts from both countries, due to more transit time and lack of readily accessible trade routes.**
 - Despite limitations, trade in food processing, mining, pharmaceuticals, textiles, skill development, science & technology, Information Technology, culture and tourism are continued between two countries.
- **India's Assistance:**
 - India delivered **major food assistance** in 2001-02. To overcome a crisis caused by an unprecedented harsh winter in January-February **2008, India gave a grant of USD 2 million** (USD 1 million as cash assistance and USD 1 million in kind, such as power cables, generators and pump sets).
 - India provided **2 million doses of oral polio vaccine** through the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** in November 2010.
 - In March 2018, India gifted **10 Russian-made ambulances** to various regions of Tajikistan drawing substantial media coverage and appreciation from high offices.
- **Indian Diaspora:**

The **total number of Indians is estimated at about 1550**, out of which more than 1250 are students.

Way Forward

- Geography has placed central asia at the nexus of crucial political and economic transformations for centuries. With the actualization of the **Belt and Road Initiative, India's Connect Central Asia policy,** and the EU's new Central Asia strategy, the 21st century could possibly be the most decisive period for the region.
- Stemming from its historic cultural and economic bonds, **India is now well placed to take a more active role in the development of the region.** India's growing global visibility and key contributions to multilateral forums like the SCO have catapulted India from an observer into a critical stakeholder in the region.
- As India looks beyond its borders, **Central Asia provides India with the right platform to leverage its political, economic and cultural connections to play a leading role in Eurasia.**

Source:TH