



## India-Central Asia Summit

**For Prelims:** India-Central Asia Summit, China-Central Asia Conference, Delhi Declaration, Ashgabat Agreement, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, India-Central Asia Dialogue

**For mains:** Global Groupings, India and its Neighbourhood, Significance of Central Asia for India, Geo-political Dynamics of the Region.

### Why in News

Recently, the Prime Minister of **India hosted the first India-Central Asia Summit** in virtual format.

- It was attended by Presidents of the **Republic of [Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyz Republic](#), Republic of [Tajikistan](#), [Turkmenistan](#) and Republic of [Uzbekistan](#).**
- This first India-Central Asia **coincided with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Central Asian countries.**
- The summit came two days after a **similar China-Central Asia Conference** was held where China offered USD 500 million in assistance and pledged to ramp up trade to USD 70 billion from the present levels of about USD 40 billion a year.

### Key Points

- **Institutionalisation of the Summit:**
  - Discussed the **next steps in taking India-Central Asia relations to new heights.** In a historic decision, the Leaders agreed to institutionalise the Summit mechanism by deciding to **hold it every 2 years.**
  - They also **agreed on regular meetings** of Foreign Ministers, Trade Ministers, Culture Ministers and Secretaries of the Security Council to prepare the groundwork for the Summit meetings.
  - An **India-Central Asia Secretariat in New Delhi** would be set up to support the new mechanism.
- **India-Central Asia Cooperation:**
  - The Leaders discussed far-reaching proposals to **further cooperation in areas of trade and connectivity, development cooperation, defence and security** and, in particular, on cultural and people to people contacts. These included:
    - **Round-Table** on Energy and Connectivity.
    - **Joint Working Groups** at senior official level on [Afghanistan](#) and use of [Chabahar Port](#).
    - **Showcasing of [Buddhist](#) exhibitions** in Central Asian countries and commissioning of an India-Central Asia dictionary of common words.
    - Joint **counter-terrorism exercises.**
    - Visit of 100 member **youth delegation** annually from Central Asian countries to India and special courses for Central Asian diplomats.
  - A **comprehensive Joint Declaration was adopted** by the leaders that enumerates their common vision for an enduring and comprehensive India-Central Asia partnership.

- **Afghanistan:**
  - The leaders reiterated their **strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan** with a truly representative and inclusive government.
  - India conveyed its **continued commitment to provide humanitarian assistance** to the Afghan people.
- **India's Stand on:**
  - **Kazakhstan:** It has become a vital partner for India's energy security. India also expressed condolences for the recent [loss of life and property in Kazakhstan](#).
  - **Uzbekistan:** India's state governments are also **active partners in its growing cooperation with Uzbekistan**.
  - **Tajikistan:** Both the countries have a **longstanding cooperation in the field of security**.
  - **Turkmenistan:** It is an important part of Indian vision in the field of regional connectivity, which is evident from participation in the [Ashgabat Agreement](#).
    - **Regional connectivity in Central Asia is a key arm** of the 2018 Ashgabat Agreement.

## Significance of the Summit for India

- **Geo-Political Dynamics:**
  - The summit is symbolic of the importance attached by the leaders of India and the Central Asian countries to a comprehensive and enduring India-Central Asia partnership.
  - It is being held at a critical juncture when [tensions between the West and Russia](#) and the [United States \(US\) and China](#) are rising. India too has faced geopolitical setbacks: Border tensions with China and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.
  - It follows [President Vladimir Putin's visit to India](#), which may have allowed **India to push Russia to moderately balance China** in Eurasia and to contain the threats from Afghanistan.
  - The **recent unrest in Kazakhstan** also showed that "**new actors**" are vying for influence in the region though their motives are still not clear.
- **Trade:**
  - India has always maintained excellent diplomatic ties with all the five Central Asian states, Indian PMs including Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, have visited them. Yet, **India's trade with them has been only at USD 1.4 billion in 2019**.
  - In 2017, India joined the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) to engage with the region. But SCO is only a sluice gate to regulate the Russian and Chinese subliminal rivalry to prevent either power from dominating the region.
    - **Russia tends to use SCO for regulating India-China tensions.**
- **Security:**
  - The summit is a **massive stride for India's diplomacy**. Since the region is a critical lynchpin to India's security policy, the summit will have a waterfall impact to facilitate India's multifaceted approach towards the region.

## India-Central Asia Dialogue //



- It 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](#).
- All the countries participating in the dialogue, except for Turkmenistan, are also members of the SCO.
- The dialogue **focuses on a number of issues including ways to improve connectivity and stabilise war-ravaged Afghanistan.**

## Way Forward

- India first **needs to get its big-picture imagination of the region correct.** Central Asia is undoubtedly a zone of India's civilisational influence.
  - The **Ferghana Valley** was India's crossing-point of the **Great Silk Road**. Buddhism spread to the rest of Asia from here.
  - The Valley still connects India with three countries: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.
- When others engage with the region from the own perspectives --- China from economic ([Belt and Road Initiative](#)), Russia from strategic ([Collective Security Treaty Organisation](#)), Turkey from ethnic (Turkic Council), and the Islamic world from religious ([Organisation of Islamic Cooperation](#)) --- **it would be befitting for India to give a cultural and historical perspective to the region** through a summit-level annual meet.
- Central Asia **carries no specific stance towards any country**, with the exception of Russia. While their strategic visions are often opaque, they are wary of China.
- However, they have **strong economic ties with China** compared to little or no economic dependency on India.
- The region's **negative attitude towards Pakistan is waning**, either due to the gradual Islamization of the population or perhaps due to Russia's changed attitude towards Pakistan.
- The **notion of "Hindustan"** in the popular imagination of the people and their traditional fondness for **Bollywood could be critical factors in burnishing the relationship.** But with generational change, **India's soft power is fading. This needs to be arrested. Apart from commerce, only a value-driven cultural policy can replace the current ill-defined goals** of rebuilding India-Central Asia bonds.

[Source: PIB](#)

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