

1. Geography is the biggest barrier in India-Central Asia relations. In the light of above statement, highlight the importance of Central Asia for India. Also mention the factors constraining close economic ties between India and Central Asia. What steps have been taken in recent times by India to overcome the geographical barrier?

Answer:

As Central Asian countries were part of the erstwhile USSR, Indo-Central Asian relations remained cordial within the overall framework of the Indo-USSR relationship. After disintegration of USSR Central Asian countries are witnessing an unprecedented integration into the global economic and political mainstream, however, relation of India with Central Asian Region (CAR) remain underdeveloped compared to the existing potential.

Factors constraining close economic ties between India and central Asia:

- Geographical barriers which include mighty chain of mountains like Hindukush, Himalayas, Tien Shan formed a wall between India & CAR thus formed the natural barriers to limit the India's reach to CAR.
- Route to access the Central Asian Region goes through Pakistan & Afghanistan which are connected through Khyber Pass in Spin Ghar Mountain, Dorah Pass & Broghol Pass in Hindukush Mountain. These passes provide the limited connectivity, access to which constrained by several geo-political & strategic factors and obstacles.
- Pakistan, a gateway to central Asia for India remains unwilling and key hurdle in connecting India with CAR through roads.
- Terrorist group like Taliban & NATO operations in Afghanistan have been factors of instability which restrict the further infrastructure especially transport linkages development in Afghanistan.

Importance of central Asia to India:

CAR has been significant for India to cater its interests in energy security, economics, and counterterrorism.

- India is the world's fourth largest energy consumer & depends largely on imported resources, while Central Asia, with its abundant oil, gas, and uranium reserves as well as hydroelectric potential, is key to reducing its energy dependency on the Middle East & greater energy diversification.
- Trade of India with whole region is at a relatively low level of around 500 million US dollars compared to the potential exist between the two. Seeing the lesser demand from Europe & developed countries, Central Asia can be the future market for Indian products.
- India has been suffering from terrorism for long. Instability in Afghanistan & strengthening of terrorist group are hurting India's security & economic interests in the region. So to contain the spreading of religious extremism, vulnerability of CAR to it & strategic concerns from Kashmir angle, counterterrorism & talks on stability in the Afghanistan are area of cooperation.

Steps taken in recent times by India to overcome the geography barrier

- The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) INSTC that includes rail, road, and water transport from Mumbai in India via Bandar Abbas in Iran to Moscow in Russia has been under consideration & dry trials has begun on the route. Completion of this route will reduce the dependency of India on Pakistan & Afghanistan to reach the Central Asia.
- Construction of an ambitious pipeline (called TAPI) connecting the Caspian gas fields in Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and finally India is on cards however the project has been stagnant due to turbulent relationship between India & Pakistan.
- The connect Central Asia Policy of India Comprises the cooperation in field of education, medicine, IT and, energy & transport linkages between India & CAR. India should peruse it at a faster pace to develop a long term mutually beneficial relations.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS**Answer the following Questions**

1. The Marathas failed to fill the political vacuum created by the decline of the Mughal Empire because of a number of reasons. Discuss. (150 words)
2. The East India Company as a political power had long been dead, what the Act of 1858 did was to give its corpse a decent burial. Analyze. (150 words)