



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine India's recent engagements with Central Asian countries and their significance for India's strategic interests. **(150 words)**

27 Aug, 2024 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach:

- Introduce by highlighting India's renewed focus on Central Asia in recent years
- Delve into India's Recent Engagement with Central Asian Countries
- Highlight the Significance of Central Asia for India's Strategic Interests
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The "**Connect Central Asia**" policy, initiated in 2012, has evolved into a multifaceted approach encompassing diplomatic, economic, cultural, and security dimensions.

- The watershed moment in India's Central Asian diplomacy came with the first India-Central Asia Summit in January 2022.

India's Recent Engagement with Central Asian Countries:

- **Connectivity:** The development of the **Chabahar Port in Iran**, with India's investment of **USD 500 million**, serves as a gateway to Central Asia, circumventing the geopolitical challenges posed by **Pakistan**.
 - The **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, a 7,200 km multi-modal network, promises to **slash transit times between India and Central Asia by up to 40%**.
- **Energy Security:** Central Asia's vast hydrocarbon reserves align with India's growing energy needs, fostering a natural synergy. Key developments include:
 - The **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline**, despite geopolitical hurdles, remains a cornerstone of India's energy diversification strategy.
 - Nuclear fuel corporation has seen notable progress, with Kazakhstan supplying India with **5,000 tonnes of uranium between 2015-2019**.
 - This partnership is crucial for India's ambitious nuclear energy program, which aims to increase nuclear power capacity to **22,480 MWe by 2031**.
- **Defense and Security Cooperation:** India's security engagement with Central Asia has deepened, driven by shared concerns over terrorism, extremism, and regional stability. Key initiatives include:
 - Regular joint military exercises, such as the **India-Kazakhstan "KAZIND" exercise and counter-terrorism drills with Kyrgyzstan**, enhance interoperability and strategic trust.
 - The establishment of the **India-Central Asia Joint Working Group on Afghanistan in 2020** reflects a coordinated approach to regional security challenges, particularly in light of the evolving situation in **Afghanistan post-2021**.
 - India's full membership in the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) since 2017**

has provided an additional multilateral platform for security cooperation and strategic dialogue with Central Asian partners.

- **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:** Recognizing the soft power potential of cultural affinities, India has intensified its cultural diplomacy:
 - The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program offers scholarships annually to **Central Asian countries**, fostering educational and professional linkages.

Conclusion

India's renewed focus on **Central Asia** in recent years marks a significant shift in its foreign policy paradigm, reflecting a **strategic recalibration** to enhance its **geopolitical influence** and **economic footprint** in this pivotal region.

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