

Since the central Asian region remains significant in India's strategic thinking, the engagement with the region remains crucial. Explain

Ans.

The central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are landlocked by Russia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Caspian sea and Europe. Because of its geographical location, India was not able to grow economically from central Asian countries due to lack of connectivity.

The central Asian countries were earlier part of USSR. Hence Russia has political and military influence over it.

But still India also share a close connection with central Asian countries.

India's close connection:

1) Civilisational - Due to ancient silk route, Buddhism, Islam, the countries share a close cultural heritage with India. The first Mughal emperor of India - 'Babur' was from Uzbekistan.

2) Cultural link - We deploy soft power in these countries since they like classical art forms, Bollywood movies, Indian foods and our culture.

Significance of Central Asia Countries:

1) They are rich in natural resources like oil and gas, Uranium, Metals, Minerals like Rare earth metals. They have hydro power potential.

But we have certain constraints in terms of connectivity:

1) All central Asian are landlocked and Caspian sea is also not open sea.
2) Since Wakhan Corridor is occupied by Pak, India lacks connectivity through afghanistan.

Our only way is through Iran. We have few ambitious project in connecting with Iran. They are Chabahat Port in Iran and INSTC (International North-south Transport Corridor) through Bahar Abbas port of Iran.

India's challenges:

1) After we left Afghanistan, the region has been dominated by Russia, China and Pakistan. This affects India's problem in LOC, LAC and pak occupied India.
2) India's dependence on Iran - The relationship between India and Iran was affected by Nuclear sanctions imposed by US and India was forced to oblige.

India's Move:

India needs to concentrate geopolitically than geoeconomically in central Asia Region.
Since Russia is threatened by China's ^{economic} influence in these region, both countries India and Russia have Joint defense production and Increased Military exercise to protect India's interest. This might gain mutual gain but non-engagement would be costly. Hence India has conducted virtual summit on Republic day by inviting all central Asian countries as chief guest. This will develop the engagement in central Asia Region.