India’s Central Asian Outreach

What is the issue?

The dramatic developments in Afghanistan have thrown up renewed challenges for India’s regional and bilateral ties with Central Asia.

Why is Central Asia significant to India?

- The Central Asian region is considered to be the part of India’s “**extended neighborhood**.”
- Over the past decade, the region has become the site of great power tussles over energy resources.
- At the same time, the world witnessed India’s rise as an economic power and a regional power.
- China’s deep inroads in the Central Asian republics in terms of investment is also a concern.
- Central Asia is geostrategic position as an access point between Europe and Asia is of greater significance in terms of trade.

What interventions were made by India in Central Asia?

- After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the formation of the independent republics in Central Asia, India reset its ties with the strategically critical region.
- New Delhi signed the **Strategic Partnership Agreements** (SPA) with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to stimulate defence cooperation and deepen trade relations.
- India formulated its **Connect Central Asia Policy** which is a broad-based approach including political, security, economic, and cultural connections
- India signed MoUs with Iran in 2015 to develop the **Chabahar port** in the Sistan-Baluchistan province to diversify the export markets and control China’s ambitions.
- The government has also proposed to include the strategic Chabahar Port in the International North-South Transport Corridor(INSTC).

- The Central Asian countries have admitted New Delhi into the **Ashgabat Agreement** allowing India to facilitate trade and commercial interactions with Central Asia and Eurasia.
- India has extended a credit line of $200 million for the support of development projects in Kyrgyzstan.
- It has signed an memorandum of understanding (MoU) on High-Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP).
- Mr. Jaishankar has become the first Indian External Affairs Minister to visit Armenia.
- India has supported efforts for a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

What are the present challenges in the relation?

- **Re-establishment of Taliban** - The Taliban re-gaining its supremacy over Afghanistan has exposed the weakness of coalitions such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization whose major aim is to counter terrorism.
- **Chinese presence** – There are growing geostrategic and security concerns regarding the BRI's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its violation of India's sovereignty.
- India needs clear recalibration of its regional engagement with Central Asian countries.

Reference

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