

Embassy of India
Ashgabat

India-Turkmenistan Bilateral Brief

India and Turkmenistan share historical and civilizational linkages. Archaeological finds have revealed contacts between the Indus Valley Civilization and Bronze Age settlements in southern Turkmenistan. A statue of Buddha found in the ruins of Merv (Mary Province) in Turkmenistan suggests trade and cultural links between the two countries since ancient times as Merv was an important point in the famous Silk Route. The presence of Turkmen Gate in Delhi, built in honour of Turkmen Sufi poet Shah Turkmen Bayabani also testifies the age-old links between both countries.

India has been maintaining contacts with Turkmenistan even before its independence from the erstwhile USSR in October 1991. India was among the first countries to recognize Turkmenistan's independence in December 1991 with formal diplomatic relations being established in April 1992 and resident Mission of India in Ashgabat set up in January 1994. The year 2022 marked 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries.

Political relations:

India enjoys warm and cordial relations with Turkmenistan. Both countries have established mechanisms such as Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation at the level of Foreign Minister and Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) at the level of Deputy Foreign Minister. The last IGC was held in New Delhi on August 14, 2017 while the last FOC was held in online format on January 13, 2021.

High-level visits have provided momentum to further strengthening of bilateral ties. From Turkmen side, the first President Saparmyrat Niyazov visited India twice in 1994 & 1997. Former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited India in May 2010 during which 5 bilateral documents were signed. From Indian side, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid a visit to Ashgabat from July 10-11, 2015 as part of his Central Asia tour. Besides meeting with President Berdimuhamedov, he also inaugurated the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre in Ashgabat, the first of its kind in Central Asia & unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi. 7 MoUs in sectors such as chemicals, S&T, tourism, yoga & Ayurveda, defense, sports etc. were signed during the visit. President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind visited Ashgabat on April 02-04, 2022 – the first Indian President to visit Turkmenistan as well as the first Head of State to visit Ashgabat after the election of President Serdar Berdimuhamedov. 4 MoUs were signed during the visit on finance, disaster management, culture and arts as well as youth affairs. President also inaugurated an India Corner at the Institute of International Relations, Ashgabat.

Other high-level visits include that of EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj to Ashgabat in August & September 2018 (transit visits), FM Rashid Meredov's visit to Amritsar for "Heart of Asia" conference in December 2016, transit visit to New Delhi in February 2020 as well as for the India-Central Asia FMs meeting in New Delhi in December 2021. Secretary of State Security Council Charymyrat Amanov visited New Delhi for the 'Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan' convened by NSA Shri Ajit Doval in November 2021. Recently, Nurmuhamet Amanepesov, Cabinet Minister for Health, Science & Technology, and Education participated virtually in Voice of Global South Summit hosted by India in January 2023.

Turkmenistan has been supportive of India's candidature at various international organizations/forums such as UNSC non-permanent seat for the term 2021– 2022, Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage for the period of 2022-26, Radio Regulations Board (RRB) of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for the term 2023-26, Council of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for the period of 2022-25, Executive Director post of Asian Development Bank, membership of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for the term 2022–2024, UNESCO Executive Board & World Heritage Committee for the term of 2021-2025 etc.

India-Central Asia Mechanism:

Turkmenistan has been a part of the India-Central Asia Dialogue framework since the beginning. In the 1st ICAD held in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) in January 2019, EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj met Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov. The 2nd ICAD was held in virtual mode on October 28, 2020 wherein Turkmenistan was represented by FM Meredov.

Under the framework of ICAD, 4-member Turkmen media delegation traveled to New Delhi and Bengaluru as part of a "familiarization visit for Central Asian journalists" from April 22-28, 2019.

The 2nd India-Central Asia Business Council meeting was held on October 28, 2020, convened by FICCI, wherein Chairman of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan Dovletgeldi Rejepov participated.

Former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov virtually participated in the 1st India – Central Asia Summit (ICAS) held on January 27, 2021. Within the framework of ICAS, Turkmenistan participated in the 1st India-Central Asia Culture Ministers meeting (held virtually in April 2023), JWG on Afghanistan (held in New Delhi in March 2023) and JWG on Chabahar (held in Mumbai in April 2023).

Economic Relations:

Bilateral trade between India and Turkmenistan has been modest despite the huge potential. Although it was affected by Covid-19, following opening up of transport

links, there has been a surge in trade volumes. In current financial year 2022-23, it has already reached record levels & is expected to cross \$ 200 million mark for the first time. Following table shows bilateral trade (in million US \$) over the years:

Items	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 (April- January)
Total Trade Turn Over	80.46	66.27	37.89	60.94	114.36	161.85
Imports (Turkmenistan to India)	26.15	20.63	3.99	0.30	10.07	82.94
Exports (India to Turkmenistan)	54.31	45.64	33.90	60.64	104.29	78.91

*(Source: Department of Commerce, GoI)

Major items of India's exports are pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, sugar, meat, electronic and electrical items, machinery, woven apparel and tyres. Turkmen exports to India largely comprise fertilizers, inorganic minerals, chemicals, dyes, etc.

Ashgabat Agreement:

India & Turkmenistan are part of the Agreement on the Establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor (Ashgabat Agreement) which India joined in February 2018. It envisages establishment of an international transport and transit corridor between Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

INSTC:

Turkmenistan has expressed interest in joining the India led INSTC by involving its Turkmenbashi port on the Caspian Sea. It has also evinced interest utilizing Chabahar Port (Iran) built with Indian assistance for transshipment of goods.

Culture and Education:

Indian TV serials as well as music are popular with Turkmen people. Bollywood movies are routinely shown on Turkmen TV Channels and Indian actors and actresses are well known among local population. Indian film festivals are held on regular basis in different cities in Turkmenistan.

Visits of cultural delegations:

- ⑩ A Turkmen cultural delegation visited India in November, 2016 for performance in Delhi and Chennai on the occasion of 25th Anniversary of Turkmenistan's Independence.

- ⑩ An Indian cultural troupe performed at a friendship concert at Berkarar Mall in Ashgabat on 26th January 2017 as part of Indian's Republic Day celebration.
- ⑩ 'India Cultural Week' including exhibition, dance performance, film and food festival was celebrated in Ashgabat in May 2017 to mark 25th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Turkmenistan.
- ⑩ An Indian Tabla group visited Turkmenistan for participation in International Scientific Conference and festival "Ancient Cradle of Musical Art" organized by State Cultural Centre of Turkmenistan in April, 2018.
- ⑩ A 14-member group "Bollywood Rockers" performed in Turkmenistan in August 2019.
- ⑩ An 11-member Turkmen Cultural Folk Group "Galkynysh" visited India to participate in the International Folk Dance and Music Festival in December 2018.
- ⑩ Asian News International (ANI), India and State News Agency, Turkmenistan (TDH) signed a MoU on free exchange of content in an online meeting held on November 9, 2020.
- ⑩ An 8-member Bharatnatyram troupe from ICCR visited Turkmenistan in January 2023 and performed in Ashgabat and Mary.

Embassy organized several cultural activities in 2021-22 like Indian Cooking Competition, Yoga Master Class, 5-day Indian Film Festival, Garba Night, Saree Draping Competition etc. as part of AKAM celebrations.

Yoga continues to be one of the most important bridge in India-Turkmen relations. A Yoga teacher (from ICCR) and an Ayurveda expert (from Ministry of Ayush) are currently deployed at the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre at Bagtyyarlyk Sports Complex, Ashgabat offering free yoga classes & Ayurveda consultation to visitors. They also teach at the State Medical University in Ashgabat. International Day of Yoga is being celebrated in Turkmenistan every year since 2015 enthusiastically.

In 2010, a Hindi Chair was established by India in Azadi Institute of World languages, Ashgabat where Hindi is being taught to university students. India also provides training for Turkmen nationals under its ITEC programme. Since the inception of the programme for Turkmenistan in 1994, over 400 Turkmen nationals have been trained in various courses. In addition, India provides ICCR Scholarships to Turkmen students to pursue graduation, post-graduation and Ph. D. There are currently over 300 students from Turkmenistan pursuing their higher education in various universities in India including those doing self-financed studies. ITEC /ICCR, Hindi Days are regularly organized by Embassy in association with respective alumni / institutes.

Science and Technology:

An agreement on cooperation in the field of S&T was signed between the two countries in May 2010. Subsequently, a Programme of Cooperation on S&T for the period 2015-2017 was signed during PM's visit in July 2015. Some key areas identified for bilateral cooperation in S&T are space, energy and healthcare.

India – Turkmenistan Information Technology Centre (ITITC)

During the first IGC meeting in October 2006, India announced the plan to establish an IT centre in Ashgabat. The Centre was inaugurated by Mr. Sachin Pilot, then MoS for Communications & IT at the Magtymguly State University, Ashgabat in October 2011. The first batch of trainers was trained in India under a special ITEC programme organized by CDAC, Pune. The Centre continues to function successfully, offering IT training to students and Turkmen citizens.

Turkmen – India Industrial Training Centre (TIITC):

In 2002, India set up an 'Industrial Training Centre' in the Institute of Architecture & Construction in Ashgabat which was executed by Hindustan Machine Tools (International) Ltd., Bengaluru. The centre was then upgraded, the first phase of which included supply of heavy machines, installation of equipment and other items, commissioning and functioning, which was completed in August 2017.

Defence:

Cooperation in the area of defence started with signing of Defence Cooperation Agreement during PM's visit to Turkmenistan in July 2015. India provides capacity building and training assistance to Turkmen armed forces annually through ITEC and tailor-made courses. In February 2021, 16 Turkmen paratroopers underwent skydiving training in Bakloh, India as part of capacity building assistance. The 2nd phase of training was held in Turkmenistan in August – September 2021, during which an 8-member paratrooper team visited from India to train Turkmen paratroopers.

Indian community

There are very few Indian nationals in Turkmenistan numbering about 100. Most are semi-skilled / skilled workers employed in construction and oil & gas sectors. There are also a few engineers and technicians working in textile sector. There are no Indian Associations in Turkmenistan. There are also no Indian students studying /enrolled in any Turkmen educational institutes.

Air links:

Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, Turkmenistan Airlines used to operate 3 direct flights to New Delhi and 6 flights to Amritsar (with connection to Birmingham) in a week from Ashgabat. Direct flight operations have restarted from March 2023 with one flight a week (Sunday) between Ashgabat-New Delhi.
