

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 Amannepesov, 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.

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). Turkmenistan also sent a 20-member delegation to participate in the 2nd Central Asia Youth Delegation (from 06-12 March, 2024).

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 2023-24 bilateral trade stood at \$112.39 million. Following table shows bilateral trade (in million US \$) over the years:

Items	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total Trade Turn Over	80.46	66.27	37.89	60.94	114.36	192.01	112.39
Imports (Turkmenistan to India)	26.15	20.63	3.99	0.30	10.07	101.72	74.93
Exports (India	54.31	45.64	33.90	60.64	104.29	90.29	37.46

Items	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
to Turkmenistan)							

*(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 formally expressed its desires to join INSTC. It has also evinced interest utilizing Chabahar Port (Iran) built with Indian assistance for transshipment of goods.

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, the 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.

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.

Yoga continues to be one of the most important bridges in India-Turkmen relations. Pursuant to ICCR's guidelines, a local yoga teacher has been hired since June 2023 who conducts yoga classes 6 days a week. An Ayurveda expert (from Ministry of Ayush) is currently deployed at the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre at Bagtyyarlyk Sports Complex, offering free Ayurveda consultation to visitors. He also teaches at the State Medical University in Ashgabat. International Day of Yoga is being celebrated in Turkmenistan every year since 2015 enthusiastically. Further, Hindi language is also being taught at the Azadi Institute of World Languages in Ashgabat.

Some recent cultural exchanges include inauguration of Rabindranath Tagore's statue in the recently inaugurated Magtymguly Cultural Complex in Ashgabat, visit of representatives of State Committee of Turkmenistan for TV/Radio Broadcasting & Cinematography to India for filming a documentary on the poet Magtymguly Fragi in April 2024, visit of 7-member Kathak dance troupe from ICCR to Turkmenistan in January 2024 who conducted a master class of Indian Classical Dance in

renowned Magtymguly theatre in Ashgabat for Turkmen dance practitioners and students. They also performed at the Mukam Palace in Ashgabat on the 75th Republic Day of India. An 11-member Turkmen dance group “Nazli” participated in the 9th India International Dance & Music Festival held in New Delhi in October 2023. Indian Bihu folk-dance troupe ‘Gandarbha Kala Kendra’ from Assam participated in the International Folk Dance Festival ‘Awaza – 2023’ in June 2023. The troupe also performed at Cinema & Concert Theatre ‘Watan’ in Ashgabat on June 17, 2023. An 8-member Bharatnatyam troupe from ICCR visited Turkmenistan in January 2023 and performed in Ashgabat and Mary.

India is offering full scholarships for 17 Turkmen students every year in different Indian Universities in different fields along with scholarships in the field of AYUSH and Yoga. Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra also extends scholarships for study of Hindi Language.

Visits of cultural delegations:

- 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.
- 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.
- ‘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.
- 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.
- A 14-member group “Bollywood Rockers” performed in Turkmenistan in August 2019.
- An 11-member Turkmen Cultural Folk Group “Galkynysh” visited India to participate in the International Folk Dance and Music Festival in December 2018.

- 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.
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 - Indian Bihu folk-dance troupe 'Gandarbha Kala Kendra' from Assam participated in the International Folk Dance Festival 'Awaza – 2023' from June 13 – 16, 2023. The troupe also performed at Cinema & Concert Theatre 'Watan' in Ashgabat on June 17, 2023.
 - 11-member Turkmen dance group "Nazli" participated in the 9th India International Dance & Music Festival held in New Delhi in October 2023.
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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 two flights a week (Wednesday, Thursday) between Ashgabat-New Delhi.

(As on August 31, 2023)