

India-Turkmenistan Bilateral Relations

India-Turkmenistan Bilateral Brief

India and Turkmenistan share historical and civilizational linkages, established by archaeological evidence that contacts existed 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 intersection in the "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 had maintained 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. Formal diplomatic relations were established in April 1992 with opening of resident Mission of India in Ashgabat in January 1994. The year 2022 marked 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between both the countries.

Political:

India enjoys friendly relations with Turkmenistan with close cooperation in both bilateral and multilateral fora. Both countries have established institutional mechanisms including Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) at the level of Deputy Foreign Minister and Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation at the level of Foreign Minister. The last IGC was held in New Delhi on August 14, 2017. Last FOC was held in online format on January 13, 2021.

High-level visits have provided momentum to further strengthening of bilateral ties. The first President of Turkmenistan Saparmyrat Niyazov visited India twice in 1994 and in 1997. Thereafter, the second & Former President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited India in May 2010 during

which 5 bilateral documents were signed. From the 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 the then President Gurbanguly 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 at the same premises. 7 MoUs in sectors defence, S&T, tourism, yoga & Ayurveda, sports amongst others, were signed during the visit. President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind visited Ashgabat from 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 Room" at the Institute of International Relations, Ashgabat.

Other high-level visits include that of FM Meredov's visit to Amritsar for "Heart of Asia" conference in December 2016, followed by the transit visits of the then External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj to Ashgabat in August & September 2018 (transit visits), 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 Turkmenistan Security Council Charymyrat Amanov visited New Delhi for the 'Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan' convened by NSA Shri Ajit Doval in November 2021. Cabinet Minister for Health, Science & Technology, and Education Nurmuhammet Amanepesov participated virtually in Voice of Global South Summit hosted by India in January 2023. EAM Dr. S Jaishankar met with FM Meredov on the sidelines of the UNGA and discussed issues of bilateral significance in September 2024.

Turkmenistan has been supportive of India's candidature at various international organizations including UNSC non-permanent seat for the term 2021- 2022; India's candidature to the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP) of UNESCO for period 2023-27; Executive Director of Asian Development Bank; Council of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) under Category 'B' for the period

2024-25; Executive Council of World Meteorological Organization, amongst others.

India-Central Asia Mechanism:

Turkmenistan has been a part of the India-Central Asia Dialogue (ICAD) framework since the beginning. In the 1st ICAD held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan in January 2019, the then EAM of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj interacted with Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan FM Rashid Meredov. Under the framework of ICAD, 4-member Turkmen media delegation travelled to New Delhi and Bengaluru as part of a “familiarization visit for Central Asian journalists” from April 22-28, 2019. The 2nd ICAD was held in virtual mode on October 28, 2020 wherein Turkmenistan was represented by FM Meredov. 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.

The then 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 (virtually in April 2023), Joint Working Group (JWG) on Afghanistan (New Delhi, March 2023) and JWG on Chabahar (Mumbai, April 2023). Turkmenistan also sent a 20-member delegation to participate in the 2nd Central Asia Youth Delegation (06-12 March, 2024); 2-member delegation of journalists participated in the familiarization visit of journalists from countries of Eurasia programme by XP Division, MEA (21-28 June 2024).

Defence:

Since 2014, India and Turkmenistan have gradually expanded their defence cooperation, focusing on areas of shared interest such as counter-terrorism, regional security, and military capacity-building. A significant milestone in India-Turkmenistan defence relations was the signing of the Defence Cooperation Defence Cooperation Agreement during PM's visit to Turkmenistan in July 2015. India has consistently supported the Turkmen

armed forces through ITEC and customized training courses. In February 2021, 16 Turkmen paratroopers underwent skydiving training in Bakloh, India as part of India’s capacity-building efforts. 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, further strengthening ties between the two defence forces.

Economic & Commercial:

Bilateral trade between India and Turkmenistan has enormous potential for growth and diversification. In 2023-24 bilateral trade stood at \$112.39 million. Following table shows bilateral trade (in million US \$) over the years:

Items	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25 (Apr-Nov)
Total Trade Turn Over	60.94	114.36	192.01	112.39	133.51
Imports (Turkmenistan to India)	0.30	10.07	101.72	74.93	101/43
Exports (India to Turkmenistan)	60.64	104.29	90.29	37.46	32.08

*(Source: Department of Commerce, Gol)

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 of fertilizers, inorganic minerals, chemicals, dyes, etc. In July 2024, Embassy in association with APEDA organized an Indian Mango Festival in Ashgabat. Four varieties of mangoes (Dussheri, Chausa, Langra and Raw Mango) were showcased at the festival which was attended by more than 100 Turkmen businesses, representatives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan.

India and Turkmenistan cooperate closely in trade and transport frameworks. Turkmenistan joined the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) in July 2023. Cargo shipment using the eastern branch of the INSTC via Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan is gaining momentum. 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.

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 Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's visit in July 2015. Some key areas identified for bilateral cooperation in S&T are space, energy and healthcare. The Government of India has been collaborating with Turkmenistan, offering IT training courses to students and Turkmen citizens by establishing IT Centres. In the realm of academic engagement between India and Turkmenistan, collaboration has been observed in the science and technology domain, wherein at different points of time, the two countries have been involved in various initiatives like:

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 instructors was trained in India under a special ITEC programme organized by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), Pune. ITITC 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' at 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.

Education:

The leaders from both the countries have reiterated deepening cooperation in the education sector and develop relations with the educational institutions of India and Turkmenistan. To enhance education and cultural cooperation between India and Turkmenistan, the delegation from the Embassy of Turkmenistan in India, paid a visit to Osmania University in Hyderabad, Telangana in December 2024. The visit underscored the commitment of both the parties in fostering collaboration in the domain of academics, research and cultural exchange.

The Turkmen nationals have been receiving training under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and ICCR programme of the Indian government and have been trained in various courses.

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) & Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Programme:

In 2024, 11 students from Turkmenistan went to India for various ITEC courses. India is also offering full ICCR scholarships for 17 Turkmen students every year in different Indian Universities in different fields along with scholarships in the field of AYUSH and Yoga.

Hindi language has been one of the earliest language course being taught at the Azadi Institute of World Languages in Ashgabat. Every year, World Hindi Diwas is celebrated at the Institute with participation of students & faculty of Hindi language. The Hindi department of the Azadi Institute brought out the compilation of literary works of Turkmen National Poet Magtymguly Fragi in

Hindi in 2024. Embassy screened the documentary 'Bollywood Mai Hindi' at the Institute which was attended by students and faculty of Hindi language (Jan 2025). The screening was followed by a discussion on the role of Indian films in propagation of Hindi language abroad. Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra also extends scholarships for study of Hindi Language.

Culture:

Cultural linkages between India and Turkmenistan have historical context and resonate in close and similar traditions. The performing arts, Indian cinema and music are very popular in Turkmenistan, with regular exchanges of cultural troupes from both the sides. Cultural cooperation has been further enhanced with celebration of National days and various commemorative events. Yoga continues to be one of the most enduring and effective bridges in India-Turkmen relations. Yoga teachers have been conducting regular yoga classes. International Day of Yoga is being celebrated in Turkmenistan every year since 2015. An Ayurveda expert, from Ministry of AYUSH has been offering free Ayurveda consultations and lectures at different institutes of Turkmenistan including the State Medical University in Ashgabat. In pursuance of bilateral cooperation in exchange of information and media, 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.

In the recent years some of the notable cultural events include an 8-member Bharatnatyam troupe from ICCR performed in Turkmenistan (January 2023); a Bihu folk-dance troupe 'Gandarbha Kala Kendra' from Assam participated in the International Folk Dance Festival 'Awaza – 2023' (June 2023); 11-member Turkmen dance group "Nazli" participated in the 9th India International Dance & Music Festival held in New Delhi (October 2023); a Master class & joint performances by 7-member Kathak dance troupe from ICCR to Turkmenistan (January 2024). As part of the celebrations of 300th birth anniversary of Turkmen national poet Magtymguly Pyragy, in May 2024, Turkmenistan installed a statue of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore in the Magtymguly Cultural Complex in Ashgabat. This was noted with deep appreciation by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi in his "Mann Ki Baat" address.

Furthermore, representatives of State Committee of Turkmenistan for TV/Radio Broadcasting & Cinematography visited India for filming a documentary on the poet in April 2024. Other commemorative cultural events included a conference and an exhibition on "The relevance of Gandhian Philosophy in 21st Century" to celebrate 155th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi (02 October, 2024), 'Ekta Diwas' (01 November 2024), Diwali, Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas (09 January 2025), World Hindi Diwas (10 January 2025), and Republic Day (26 January 2025) highlighting 75 years of Indian Constitution.

Indian film festivals have been regularly organized in Turkmenistan. Events celebrating Indian cinema include an exhibition and screening of Indian films in Turkmenbashi (20-22 December 2024). The Film Festival included the iconic film 'Awara' commemorating centenary year of Raj Kapoor in Indian cinema; a film festival was also held in the capital city of Ashgabat in January 2025. On the occasion of the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Embassy in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture of Turkmenistan, organized a "Musical tribute to Indian Cinema", highlighting 100 years of legendary Raj Kapoor performed by the State Symphony Orchestra of Turkmenistan (9th January 2025).

Indian community:

Indian nationals in Turkmenistan number about 100. Most are professionals, semi-skilled & skilled workers employed in construction, textiles, pharmaceuticals and oil & gas sectors. All Indian nationals are on short term work / employment visas as permitted by Turkmen internal policies. 4th India-Turkmenistan Consular Dialogue was held in Ashgabat on 24 January 2025.

February 2025