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An Overview of the India-Kyrgyzstan Relationships: Challenges and Opportunities

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Introduction

Historically, the relations between India and Kyrgyzstan have been close for three reasons, first, in the second century AD, the Sakas located in the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan and the expansion of the Scythian kingdom spread near the southern coast of India to form an empire called Indo-Scythian establishment took place in 110 to 80 BC. Second, the exchange of philosophical ideologies between the two countries under the influence of Buddhism and third, Kyrgyzstan is historically linked to the Fergana Valley and the Silk Road, which paves the way for India's historical cultural and trade links with Kyrgyzstan.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, relations between India and Kyrgyzstan were limited, but soon after the independence of Kyrgyzstan, India laid the foundation of diplomatic relations by formulating its foreign policy towards Kyrgyzstan. There are three reasons for India's inclination towards Kyrgyzstan. First, commitment to secularism and cooperation with India in the field of Islamic fundamentalism. Second, promoting investment in new areas of economic cooperation and accelerating new opportunities for cottage industry and entrepreneurship. Kyrgyzstan being an upstream country, they are rich in water resources. India may have new investment opportunities in the hydroelectric sector. Third, Kyrgyzstan can pave the way in future for a corridor connecting India with Europe and other Central Asian countries. If the geographical location of Kyrgyzstan is described, then its geographical range is Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan in the southwest, Tajikistan in the south and China in the east.

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At present, Kyrgyzstan as an independent nation preferred political reforms over economic reforms. The reign of the former President Almazbek Sharshenovich Atambayev ended in 2011-2017. Former Prime Minister (2016) Sooronbay Jeenbekov Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (Sooronbay Jeenbekov) was elected to the presidency with 54% of the vote. As a result, it was a transfer of power, a milestone in Kyrgyzstan's political development and the normal transfer of power between two elected persons. Snap parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan on 28 November 2021. They followed the annulment of the results of the October 2020

elections and the subsequent protests against the election's conduct. Seven parties passed the 5% threshold and will take up seats in the parliament. Turnout hit a record low at less than 35%.

The beginning of diplomatic relations between India and Kyrgyzstan After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Kyrgyzstan in 1995 and Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi visited Bishkek and Issyk-Kul Lake in 1985. Launched its Connect Central Asia policy in Bishkek during the first Central Asia-India Dialogue in 2012. India extended US\$ 5 million credit for the commissioning of various project plants in Kyrgyzstan. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has received a total of \$9.2 billion in financial aid from world countries and multilateral sectors since 1992. Including Line of Credit, assistance program by India (mini dairy plant in 1997-2000, potato processing plant in 2002, 2010 assistance for parliamentary elections, 2011 supply of medical equipment, 2015).

On November 14, 2022, Indian-Kyrgyz inter-MFA consultations were held in Bishkek. The parties conducted a comprehensive review of bilateral relations and concluded that they are developing satisfactorily in various areas, including political and economic spheres, as well as trade, defense and education. And on November 3, the Indian-Kyrgyz Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation held a regular meeting in a virtual format chaired by the Minister of Trade and Industry of the Government of India, Piyush Goyal, and the Minister of Digital Development of the Kyrgyz Republic, Talantbek Imanov.

Trade Relations

After Kyrgyzstan declared its independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan emerged as the first Central Asian republic as a democratic and liberal reform-oriented country. In the economic field, Kyrgyzstan has initiated a comprehensive program policy in market reforms such as privatisation, restructuring, price liberalisation, and modern trade policy and progress has been made towards creating a dynamic financial sector. At present, India is in a strong position economically. But both countries lack a direct route of trade which affects the trade of both countries.

| Indian exports to Kyrgyzstan | Kyrgyz exports to India |
|--|--|
| readymade garments and textile products, pharmaceutical products, agro-food products (tea, coffee and spices), colouring material, electrical and electronic products, machines, vehicles and spare parts, essential oils and cosmetics, perfumery, electric machines, footwear, precious stones, ferrous and non-ferrous metals etc | plastic items, raw hides and skins, woollen products, machinery and mechanical appliances, home furnishing material, canned meat, jet fuel etc |

Source: <https://www.embassyofindia/kg/pages/php?id=264>

In other areas of business, joint business and investment opportunities can be explored in metals and minerals, pharma, information sector and textiles etc. On this side, during the 2019 meeting with the Prime Minister of India, Suronbay Jeenbekov said, “We have Bilateral Investment Treaty and Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement. Both countries have also agreed on a five-year road measure in the field of trade and economic cooperation. Also, jointly launched the India-Kyrgyz Republic Business Forum to enhance B-2-B cooperation and study opportunities in other areas.

India trade with Kyrgyzstan (Value in US \$ Millions)

| S.No. | Years | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|-------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Export | 30.02 | 29.13 | 38.71 | 32.89 |
| 2 | Import | 2.59 | 1.33 | 5.16 | 1.79 |
| 3 | Total Trade | 32.60 | 30.46 | 43.87 | 34.68 |

Source: Export Import Data Bank (commerce.gov.in)

The Embassy of India in Kyrgyzstan hosted a reception in honour of the 74th anniversary of the Republic of India. 2022 was a special year for both countries: India and Kyrgyzstan celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. A year ago, at the initiative of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 1st India-Central Asia Summit was held online, in which the President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov took part. The participation of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic Marat Imankulov in the first meeting of advisers/secretaries of the India-Central Asia Security Councils in December 2022 in India is one of the institutional mechanisms for interaction.

India-Kyrgyzstan: Challenges

Indian investment in Kyrgyzstan is faced with many constraints such as a lack of investment environment, a banking system and financial institutions are not developed in Kyrgyzstan. The current visa system of Kyrgyzstan creates barriers to travel for Indian businessmen, as a result of which other countries do not get a fair opportunity to compete. Indian companies invested in mining and manufacturing in Kyrgyzstan but with no success.

Challenges like terrorism, extremism and extremism pose a great obstacle to the security of the youth and society of both countries. To create an area of lasting peace, stability and prosperity in the world, we must participate in a common goal. On the other hand, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are concerned about the increase in religion.

extremism and terrorism, so the SCO can help end this problem. For example, RATS (Regional Counter-Terrorism Framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organization) can provide a platform for information sharing to tackle common problems in the region. During the visit of Kyrgyzstan President Almazbek Sharshenov to India in 2016, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee said during that time that "there is a shared concern over the threat of terrorism and drug trafficking.

Kyrgyzstan lacks a direct route from India's border. Due to this, the economic relations between India-Kyrgyzstan seem to be less compared to other Central Asia countries. Trade between the two countries is affected due to the lack of direct road connectivity and more time taken due to winding roads as well as cost escalation. Under the India and Kyrgyzstan Memorandum on Military Technical Cooperation, India proposed to Kyrgyzstan the use of its satellite imagery to prevent terrorist activities and drug smuggling in the Batken (Batken) region of Kyrgyzstan special Terrorism Military Training has been formed jointly. Kyrgyzstan's internal disputes that can affect bilateral relations between the two countries Recently dispute, affecting the political legitimacy of Kyrgyzstan. This dispute is the allegations against the former President and internal violence.

India-Kyrgyzstan: Exploring New Opportunities

India and Kyrgyzstan should focus on the following areas and cooperation to strengthen their bilateral relations.

1. Keeping in view the commonality of their domestic supply and foreign policy imperatives, Kyrgyzstan has prioritised favourable sectors such as tourism, small and medium-sized businesses, processing and mining industries and technology information for Kyrgyzstan to engage with India.
2. It is cheaper for India to do business in Kyrgyzstan than in other Central Asian republics. Because a skilled and educated workforce is present in Kyrgyzstan. Its economy is stable, the national currency is easily convertible and it is committed to a low inflation and liberal foreign investment regime. Most important is direct access to the CIS and Chinese consumer markets.
3. In addition, there are huge opportunities for investment such as agriculture (university-to-university cooperation between the two sides, setting up of a demonstration unit for drip irrigation and Kyrgyz opening of the joint industry with India in the organic farming sector), manufacturing, electronics, energy and transport sectors. available.
4. The integration of India and Kyrgyzstan into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) may result in new opportunities for Indian entrepreneurs. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has also emerged as an important forum for regional security and economic cooperation. India has been an observer member of this group since 2005. Now

the inclusion of India as a full member of the SCO (2017) will help in moving forward towards meeting the expectations of the Asian century.

5. The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) came into force in 2015, which includes Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Armenia. EEU aims to emerge as a market with 176 million people and a 4 trillion GDP. Because the EEU has reserves of natural resources like oil, gas, minerals, coal, iron and steel etc.
6. India was invited by Russia to Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with EEU countries. The feasibility of a free trade agreement between India and the EEU is being considered. Which will provide a ready market to India, and will be very beneficial for India's economy. CIS country can become the best market for India's pharmaceuticals which will provide a huge opportunity for the Indian pharma industry through FTA. The FTA will also improve India's connectivity with Central Asia and the EEU countries, but also reduce the speed, time and cost of goods by accelerating trade relations among EEU members as well as connecting to the Iran-North-South-Transport Corridor. It would be easy to be sure.
7. Connectivity between India and Kyrgyzstan should be considered. The movement of goods with the help of INSTC (North-South Transit Corridor) will be an effective step towards solving the rich issues. India-Kyrgyzstan trade relations will get a boost. On the other hand, Chabahar Port in Iran will provide the shortest connectivity from Kyrgyzstan to India.
8. India should invest in Kyrgyzstan's natural resources like gold, coal, ore and placer gold etc. Because Kyrgyzstan is an important producer of about 20 tonnes annually. India can explore the possibilities of manufacturing jewellery in Kyrgyzstan. This will benefit the progress of Kyrgyzstan's employment and revenue sector. Tourism can become another opportunity for bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries. Issyk Kul Lake, the sky-touching mountains in Kyrgyzstan, has become a factor in attracting tourists from all over the world. The Indian experience in the tourism sector, especially hotels, travel facilities, and mountain tourism such as mountain expeditions can be used to better economic benefits in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan should be added to Visa on Arrival to simplify the visa facility to India. There is a need to discuss between the two countries to increase their exposure in the banking sector. Due to this, both countries will be able to import and export in economic and stable commercial areas.

Conclusion

Despite the shortest distance between India and Kyrgyzstan, diplomatic, economic and cultural relations have existed between the two countries since ancient times. At present, India and Kyrgyzstan are playing an important role in bilateral and multilateral (SCO, UN, CICA) fields. Which proves helpful in

following the India-Central Asia connectivity policy. Both countries should meet at regular intervals to maintain their diplomatic relations and implement new options for trade, educational and cultural exchange. Both countries should step forward in the field of national security in the face of terrorism, extremism and drug smuggling, only then both countries can get a proper environment to establish their bilateral relations. But Kyrgyzstan is so engrossed in its internal political situation that they are only engaged in reforming its political complex. For example, due to the controversy on 8 August 2019, political upheaval is going on in Kyrgyzstan. He was detained by the Kyrgyz police for spreading violence and corruption against the ex-president of Kyrgyzstan. He is alleged to have conspired to commit corruption during the modernization of the thermal power station in Bishkek and the privatisation of the building. His lawyer, Sergei Slesarev, stated that “the use of violence, mass unrest, attempt to murder, etc. charges against the representative of the Prosecutor-General’s Office, soldiers and their supporters in their residential complex in the village of Koi-Tash, Bishkek, on 8 August 2019. Atambadev surrendered to the police after a deadly two-day standoff (in which a special forces officer was killed and over 170 injured, including 79 law enforcement officers).”

For this reason, Jeenbekov accused Atambayev of violating the constitution during the immediate meeting of the Security Council. According to the Interfax news agency, “The President seriously trampled on the Constitution and laws of Kyrgyzstan by keeping within the framework of the law the fierce armed resistance that was carried out within the framework of the law. Its effect hurts the faith of the people of Kyrgyzstan in their country’s constitution. This whole matter is becoming a big challenge for the political stability of the country.”

This political upheaval may have an impact on India-Kyrgyzstan bilateral relations. Because both countries give priority to the internal security of their country and are committed to cooperating in establishing security with other countries in the world. Therefore, India not only gives importance to economic relations but also emphasises the initiative of political stability and peace. Therefore, it becomes very important to establish each other’s cooperation to further strengthen the bilateral relations in every field between the two countries because of the situation in which Kyrgyzstan. It is feared that Kyrgyzstan is once again headed for political anarchy, requiring the current president to reconcile the situation with the opposition. Otherwise, it may lead to another rebellion in the Central Asian country.

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