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**Prospects for the Development of Priority
Areas of Uzbek-Indian Cooperation**

by

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Nowadays, Uzbekistan and India express mutual interest in bringing bilateral cooperation to a higher level, showing their commitment to the historical traditions of friendly relations. Evidently, this is proved by the recent high-level official negotiations, during which a number of agreements were signed between two countries. Surely, the recent meeting of the 'India and Central Asia Dialogue', held in Samarkand in September, confirms India's great interest to boost cooperation with Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole.

International experts acknowledge that the growing trends of strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia opens unprecedented opportunities for enhancing India's comprehensive interaction with Uzbekistan. At present, the Joint statement on strategic partnership between the two countries serves as a solid basis for increasing bilateral relations in the political, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres.

Political relations:

India was among the first countries to recognize Uzbekistan's independence. According to the Protocol on establishment of diplomatic relations at the embassy level (1992), the Consulate General of India, opened in August 1988 in Tashkent, was turned into the Indian embassy in 1992, and the Consulate of the Republic of Uzbekistan in New Delhi, was transformed into the Uzbek embassy.

Since the early days of Uzbekistan's independence to the present time, five of the official visits of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov to India (1991, 1994, 2000, 2005 and 2011), three official visits of the Prime Ministers of India to Uzbekistan (1993, 2006, 2015), seven official visits at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of India to Uzbekistan (1996, 1999, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2018), four official visits of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan to India (1996, 2003, 2004 and 2017), were organized.

The current Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi made his first official visit to Uzbekistan in July 2015, which became a significant event in the social and political life of the both countries. It also provided a platform for further development of the historically friendly Uzbek-Indian relations. During the visit, Modi admitted that Uzbekistan was one of the most reliable and important partners of India in Central Asia. Similar convergent policy positions of two countries in solving key regional and global issues is considered as a reliable basis for bilateral interaction within regional and international structures. Prime Minister of India also visited Uzbekistan to participate in the SCO Summit in 2016.

Official meetings between PM Modi and Uzbekistan's newly elected President Shavkat Mirziyoyev have also taken place in the framework of the SCO summits in Astana (Kazakhstan) in 2017 and Qingdao (China) in 2018. These historic meetings gave an opportunity to take concrete measures for deepening of bilateral relations and raise them to a qualitatively new stage. It is believed that the first official visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Mirziyoyev to India in October 2018 will give a new impetus to bilateral relations, especially in such fields as economy, trade and investment.

Inter-parliamentary relation is also one of the main elements of bilateral coordination. Political consultations are held on a regular basis in the framework of Uzbek and Indian foreign office cooperation. The last round of such consultation was held in March 2017 in Delhi, during which the foreign ministry of both countries discussed the status of bilateral relations in the political, trade, economic, cultural, humanitarian fields, as well as the opportunities for comprehensive cooperation within regional and global formats like the SCO, UN and other international organizations. The officials also exchanged views on international and regional issues.

Such intergovernmental meetings help to seek a rapprochement on political and security issues at regional and international level, on expansion of trade, implementation of mutually beneficial economic projects, particularly in the Uzbekistan's Free Economic Zones (FEZs).

Economy and investment:

Uzbekistan considers India as one of the largest nations of the Asian continent and as a country with huge political, economic, human potential, and as a state which is able to play a significant role in solving not only political, but also economic problems of the world.

Currently, trade and economic relations between Uzbekistan and India are regulated by such basic bilateral agreements on trade and economic cooperation (1993), on avoidance of double taxation (1993) and on mutual promotion and protection of investments (1999).

The Uzbek-Indian intergovernmental Commission on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation, established in 1993, contributes to the development of bilateral cooperation in this priority area. At the last meeting of the Commission, held on August 16, 2018 in Tashkent, India expressed its readiness to consider the preparation and signing of the treaty on preferential trade with Uzbekistan and to bring the mutual trade turnover to one billion dollars.

If we look at the statistics over the past five years, the bilateral trade turnover has gradually increased and by the end of 2017, it reached US\$ 323.6 millionⁱ, including export from Uzbekistan to India – US\$ 32.5 million, and imports of US\$ 291.1 millionⁱⁱ.

Experts prove that there is a significant potential for further increase in bilateral trade and broaden product range of both countries. In this regard, Tashkent and New Delhi signed 22 contracts worth more than US\$ 80 million, providing agricultural products, mineral fertilizers, rare earth metals, silk and other goods to the Indian market, as well as 20 investment agreements worth more than US\$ 70 millionⁱⁱⁱ in August 2017.

The development of cooperation in the banking and financial spheres of Uzbekistan and India is one of the important elements in strengthening bilateral investment ties. Particularly, Uzbekistan is considering cooperation with the India's Eximbank to implement projects in the field of infrastructure and home construction.

Notably, more than 100 enterprises with the participation of Indian capital are active in Uzbekistan. Currently, the Indian company of high-tech production Minda and Olive Telecommunication successfully operate in the Free Economic Zone (FEZ) Navoi. There are also joint pharmaceutical companies as Nova Farm, Bravo Farm, Ultra Health Care, and Gufic Avicenna^{iv}.

In the future, Uzbekistan is interested in involving more Indian high-tech companies in implementation of joint projects in order to produce relevant ready-made industrial outputs in the country, including chemicals, medicines, textile and leather products and ICT goods. Therefore, by creating good conditions for foreign investors, Uzbekistan welcomes Indian business circles to join in implementation of industrial projects in the FEZs in such cities as Angren, Jizzakh, Hazarasp, Kokand, Gijduvan and Urgut, together with in recently created FEZs (Nukus-farm, Zomin-farm, Kosonsoy-farm, Sirdarya-farm, Boysun-farm, Bustonlik-farm and Parkent-farm), which are specialized in the production of pharmaceutical goods.

Cultural and humanitarian cooperation:

Uzbek and Indian nations share similarities in history, literature, music, painting and architecture. Undoubtedly, this is connected with the name of the Uzbek statesman, poet and writer Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur and his descendants. Their enduring legacy has a powerful potential for strengthening bilateral relations, in particular for going on scientific and cultural exchanges between Uzbekistan and India.

In the past year, the National Museum of India handed over Uzbekistan the copies of *Diwan-i-Babur*, a manuscript by Babur, which dates back to 1528, as well as miniatures of the 'Wedding Procession of Prince Dara Shikokh' of 1640. These are symbolic steps in strengthening bilateral cultural relations.

Public diplomacy between the two nations is also developing. The Uzbekistan-India Friendship Society, which is one of the tools for expanding cultural ties, has been functioning in Tashkent since 1991. Due to the constant bilateral cultural and educational ties, the citizens of both countries have extensive information about each other in various areas.

Moreover, regular classes on Indian classical dance 'Kathak', yoga and the Hindi language, are held in the center of Indian culture named after Lal Bahadur Shastri in Tashkent. The language of Hindi is taught at the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental studies. The Institute has also a Centre of Indian studies named after Mahatma Gandhi. Uzbek language courses are available at Jamia Millia University in New Delhi.

Evidently, the situation in the field of education in India is improving, a number of quality indicators are considered to be higher than in some South and East Asian countries. The most popular majors in the universities of India are information technology, management and pharmacology. In this regard, various universities of Uzbekistan have established cooperation with more than 10 Indian universities and research centers.

Annually Uzbekistan receives 25 scholarships for various courses at Indian universities within the programmes of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)^v. Most Uzbek specialists have gotten qualifications in India due to Indian programmes of technical and economic assistance (ITEC) in English, banking, small business, management, agriculture and other areas.

At Tashkent University of Information Technologies it has been established the Indian-Uzbek center of information technologies named after Jawaharlal Nehru, the aim of which is to train professors and students in IT.

The partnership between the two states is consistently developing in the field of healthcare. Indian medical institutions like Apollo, Artemis, Medanta, Max, BLK actively cooperate with Tashkent Medical Academy, Tashkent Medical Institute of Pediatrics and other specialized medical centres of Uzbekistan.

Tourism is also one of the directions of bilateral cooperation. Surely, the annual flow of foreign tourists to Uzbekistan has been growing significantly. According to statistics, in 2017 our country was visited by almost 3 million foreign tourists^{vi}, including more than 24,000 citizens of India^{vii}.

Since February of this year, Uzbekistan has facilitated procedures for issuing tourist visas for the citizens of 39 countries, including India^{viii}. Of course, these measures will help to increase the flow of Indian tourists to Uzbekistan.

Overall, further strengthening of bilateral relations between India and Uzbekistan meets the long-term interests of both countries. Economically fast-growing India is intended to become a stable partner of Uzbekistan in the fields of trade, investment, high technology and tourism. This, in turn, will create all the necessary conditions and prerequisites for expanding and deepening not only bilateral cooperation between India and Uzbekistan, but also the interactions of the Central Asian region with South Asian countries.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.

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