

INDIA–CENTRAL ASIA BACKGROUND

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Abstract

Soon after India's partition in 1947, its historical ties with the Central Asian region suffered a setback as it lost its direct overland access to the region through Afghanistan. However, after the 1971 signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, friendship and cooperation and the subsequent closer relations between India and the Soviet Union, India was able to foster closer ties with the Central Asian Republics. This region grew in strategic importance to India during the 1990s and particularly over the past decade. During the 1990s Central Asia was seen as a route for supplying the anti-Taliban coalition, the Northern Alliance, in Afghanistan. Since the turn of the century Central Asia has become increasingly important to India as a means for maintaining regional stability, especially in the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan. India was also one of the first countries to open a consulate in what later became Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent and has had a fully operational airbase in Tajikistan since 2006, making it one of only four countries to have a military base in Central Asia. The significance of Central Asia to India has also grown as India has sought to diversify its energy sources by including such imports from the region. Despite all Central Asian Republics having a higher per capita income than India, a central focus of India's relations with these countries has

been through its development cooperation. Though Indian aid to this region constitutes less than one percent of the total volume of grants and Lines of Credit extended by India overseas, the number of Central Asian bureaucrats who have received training through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) training program is significant. This brief analyzes the scope and potential of closer ties between India and the Central Asian region, with a special focus on India's development partnerships.



Map of Central Asia

INTRODUCTION

India and the Central Asian region share a long history. And though the relationship was at times marked by oppression,[1]and even genocidal levels of violence,[2] Central Asia's many forays into the Indian subcontinent paved the way for a lasting exchange of goods and ideas between the two regions.

The close trade and cultural linkages between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia, whose beginnings can be traced to the Indus valley civilization, [3]tapered after India's partition in 1947 as New Delhi found itself without a direct land corridor to the region. This meant that goods from India bound for the Central Asian region, instead of going through Pakistan and Afghanistan, would have to take much longer routes which usually involved the sea route to Iran and then overland through Iran,[4]rendering New Delhi's exports to the region less competitive.

Despite these economic and trade disadvantages, India's close political relations with the Soviet Union helped ensure continued diplomatic ties with Central Asia in the decades

after India's independence. As the Soviet and Cold War era came to an end in 1991, India, the only non-communist nation with a diplomatic outpost in Central Asia, found itself in an advantageous position to strengthen ties with the newly independent Central Asian Republics (CARs). For example in 1987, India was one of the first countries to open a consulate in what later on became Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent.[5] This Indian consulate in Tashkent had jurisdiction over the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics.[6] Though the objective of the consulate was mainly to organize the Festival of India that was to be held in cities across the Soviet Union the following year,[7] its work soon expanded to include assisting Indian students in the region who were studying on Soviet scholarships[8] as well as facilitating the last construction projects the Soviet Union awarded to Indian private sector companies to build luxury hotels in Uzbekistan.[9]

Building on its presence in Central Asia through its consulate, India was also among the first countries to recognize many of the CARs and opened its first embassy in Central Asia by converting the consulate in Tashkent, Uzbekistan into an embassy in March 1992, just three months after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.[10] Moreover, the Indian embassy in Tashkent played a significant role in facilitating people-to-people contacts between India and the broader Central Asian region.[11]

THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN AND THE STRATEGIC EMERGENCE OF THE CARs

The strategic importance of the Central Asian region to Indian foreign policy has grown over the past decades. During the decades of the Cold War, Indian foreign policy towards the region that would eventually become the region of the Central Asian Republics was largely aligned with that of the Soviet Union. India's foreign policy alignment with the Soviet Union in Western Asia partly accounted for India being among the few nations that recognized the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan after the invasion of the country by Soviet troops in 1979 and the recognition of the subsequent Soviet-backed governments. [12]

When the Soviet troops pulled out of Afghanistan in 1988/89 and the break-up of the Soviet Union became apparent Indian foreign policy switched from supporting pro-communist governments in the region to thwarting what they saw as the newly emerging political and security threat in the region, extremist Islamic groups such as the Taliban.

By 1991 India faced a severe balance of payment crisis, as decades of economic insulation and low growth rates left New Delhi with just enough foreign exchange to purchase essential imports for three weeks.[13] Though the crisis

predictably gave Indian politics an inward tilt, India's larger foreign policy focus on supporting more moderate and secular governments in Afghanistan and Central Asia remained unaffected. For example, when the communist government in Afghanistan fell in 1992, India quickly recognized the new government of Bhurauddin Rabbani as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. Similarly, despite the domestic troubles, India quickly responded to the geo-strategic shifts in Central Asia in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, recognizing Turkmenistan as a sovereign nation on 26th December 1991, just one day after it emerged independent.[14] And by August 1992, India had recognized and established diplomatic links with all five CARs.[15]

As the extremist Taliban movement started gaining strength in Afghanistan around 1994, alarm bells began ringing in New Delhi. The Indian government viewed the extremist Taliban as a domestic security threat, seeing a link between the rise of the Taliban and the insurgency in Kashmir. Indian policy makers feared that with the Taliban in power in Afghanistan, the Afghan government would lean much more towards Pakistan. They also feared that with a pro-Pakistan government in Afghanistan and Pakistan's western borders stabilized, some segments of the Pakistani government could use the close ties with Afghanistan to train extremist Islamist groups in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan and deploy these groups on Pakistan's eastern borders, Kashmir in particular.

It was thus in order to thwart the rising Taliban movement, that India, along with Russia and Iran, started supplying arms to the Rabbani government by the mid-1990s.[16] However, once the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996, India closed its embassy in the Afghan capital and started looking north to the CARs to channel goods, material and intelligence support to the main group fighting the Taliban, the Northern Alliance.[17] Though economic ties and bilateral trade with the Central Asian Republics were below potential throughout the 1990s, India began to strategically engage with the CARs bordering Afghanistan, particularly Tajikistan. The closer relationship in turn enabled a land route through which the Indian government was able to route material and intelligence support to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. [18] When U.S. troops defeated the Taliban in 2001 and the Northern Alliance-dominated, new Interim Government of Afghanistan took over, India's links to the Northern Alliance through the Central Asian Republics enabled it to be one of the first countries to set up an embassy in Kabul.

Today, though it has been over a decade since the Taliban was defeated in Afghanistan, Western Asia - including Afghanistan and several Central Asian Republics - continues to face the scourge of Islamist extremism stemming from the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Among

the more pressing dangers for countries in this region is the possibility of militants taking control of the north-eastern corridor of Afghanistan, an area which borders Tajikistan, Pakistan and China. Occupying the vast region where the tip of southern Tajikistan, Pakistan's north-western border, and north-eastern Afghanistan are in touching distance could be of enormous value to the militants, not just because it makes destabilizing Afghanistan easier, but because it could have a similar destabilizing effect on the broader Central and Western Asian region.[19] This potential for instability is among a host of factors that adds incentive to building mutually beneficial economic, strategic, and development assistance-based ties between India and the Central Asian Republics.

BROADENING INTERESTS - GROUNDS FOR DEEPER ENGAGEMENT

For India, a decade of economic growth and the consequent rise in energy demand has resulted in a considerably wider set of interests in Central Asia. Apart from addressing shared concerns of instability in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, more effective and deeper engagement with the oil and gas rich nations of Central Asia promises to help India diversify its energy imports which is a priority given India's rising energy needs. And though Iran – which is among India's most important sources of crude oil – [20] is set to receive temporary respite from Western sanctions, for India, long-term access to Iranian oil remains uncertain, with much depending on whether Tehran and the P5+1 [21] can reach a more comprehensive agreement on Iran's nuclear program by the summer of 2014. [22] The uncertainty surrounding India's access to Iranian oil in the long-term, plus China's successes in accessing natural gas from the Central Asian Republics [23] means that India cannot but afford to pursue potential energy imports from this region.

Moreover, as the US\$ 20 million grant given to Tajikistan to refurbish the Varzob-1 hydroelectric power plant, the US\$ 2.5 million also given to Tajikistan to assist with flood relief operations, and the assistance given to Uzbekistan to set up an artificial limb fitment camp highlight, [24] Indian interests in parts of Central Asia are also driven by a desire to help diversify economies of the region and to increase India's soft power in the region by addressing humanitarian concerns. Such efforts from India make it likely that more governments in Central Asia will welcome deeper development partnerships with New Delhi, especially considering the wide variety of sectors India has already supported in the region. This in turn could bode well for India as it seeks new markets and sources of energy. Deepening engagement in Central Asia would also provide India with “a platform on which [it] can further build its own legitimate economic, military and geopolitical interests.” [25]

Central Asian countries also have strategic reasons for pursuing deeper relations with India. Greater engagement with India could allay fears of Chinese or Russian influence in the region rendering any of the five CAR nations too dependent on Beijing or Moscow. An engaged India augurs “a more benign geostrategic partnership for economic and political development in Central Asia than China, Pakistan, Iran or Russia.” [26] Moreover, with its strengths in capacity development and information technology, deeper development partnerships with India could prove a boon to the Central Asian Republics, which stand to benefit from diversifying their exports. For example, petroleum products accounted for 68 percent of Kazakhstan's export earnings in 2010, lending urgency to the country's need to diversify its exports. [27] Similarly, aluminium exports were the source of over half of Tajikistan's exports earnings in 2010. [28]

Recognizing the mutual benefits of deeper relationships, India has now signed Strategic Partnership Agreements with three CARs, Uzbekistan, [29] Tajikistan [30] and Kazakhstan. [31] Apart from seeking to bolster defense ties, these strategic agreements, envisage deeper cooperation in telecommunications, information technology, food processing and pharmaceuticals sectors.

Though India's engagement with Central Asia's energy sector remains limited, efforts from New Delhi to redress the tepid ties will likely be welcomed. Already, a 2011 agreement with Uzbekistan envisages the Indian public sector company Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) Videsh prospecting for oil and gas in the Karakal region in cooperation with the Uzbek state owned company Uzbekneftegaz. [32] Kazakhstan has also expressed a willingness to increase supplies for India's civilian nuclear program, with the Kazakh state-owned company Kazatomprom set to extend the current contract to supply Indian reactors with Uranium beyond 2014, the expiration date of the present contract. [33] These prospective engagements highlight a mutual desire between India and Central Asian governments to involve a broader range of stakeholders in the development of Central Asia's energy resources.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OVERVIEW

Aside from addressing India's energy concerns, building deeper development partnerships with the Central Asian region could have a positive impact on India's broader strategic and development cooperation aspirations. India began to provide development assistance to the Central Asian countries soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the independent nations of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan emerged. Development cooperation efforts in the CAR

have operated in two phases. The first phase, from the early 1990s until 2004, focused on Lines of Credit that financed development and manufacturing projects. During this phase, grants were utilized primarily to finance drought relief programs and provide humanitarian assistance such as supplying anti-tuberculosis medicines to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in 2001[34] The second phase, which began in 2004, has seen a shift in Indian assistance to the CARs, with grants constituting the bulk of development cooperation and a marked reduction in the commitment of LOCs to the region.[35] The training programs under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, which started in the early 1990s, continue to flourish in the region.

The development assistance commitment to the CARs is a small percentage of India's overall development cooperation. Between 2008 and 2013, grants to the region averaged less than one percent of overall grants from India to other countries,[36] while Lines of Credit to the region have also averaged less than one percent of India's overall LOC commitments between 2004 and 2013.[37] Given that South Asia and Central Asia are two of the least integrated regions in the world and trade between India and CAR countries averaged at 0.1 percent of India's overall trade between 2000 and 2012,[38] it is not surprising that development cooperation efforts between the two regions have remained rather limited.

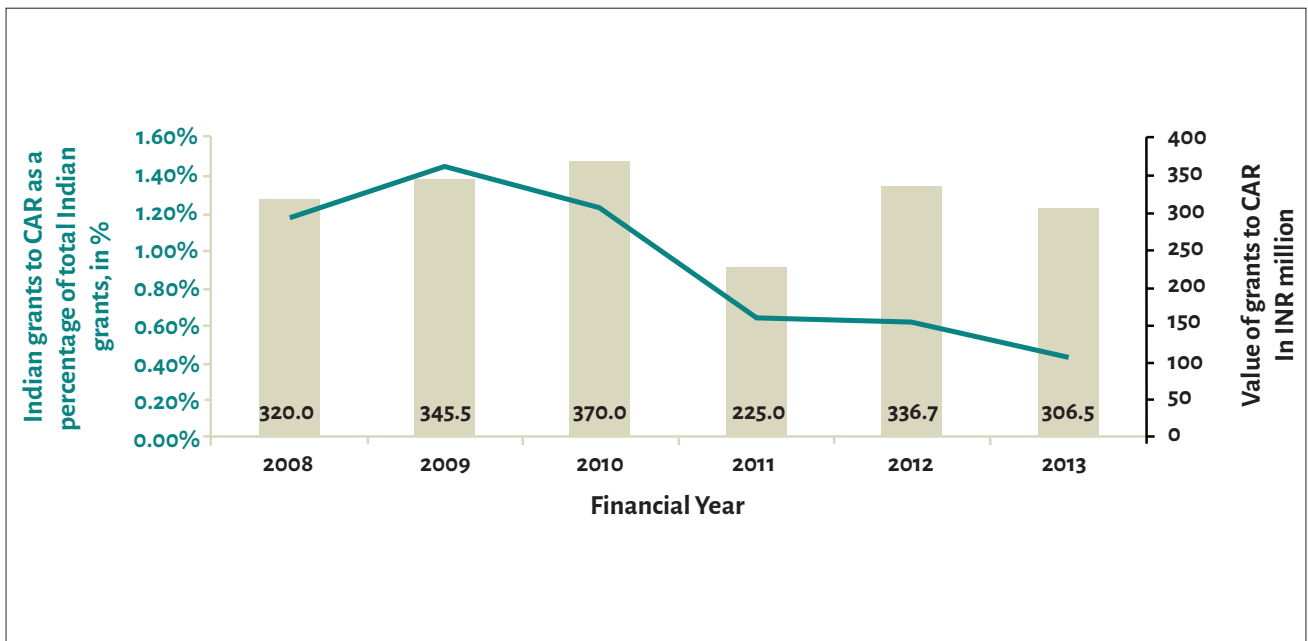
Central Asian countries also have significantly better economic and social indicators, including per capita income, literacy rates, poverty rates, and health indicators, than India and indeed other South Asian countries. The Oxford Multidimensional Poverty Index demonstrates that while 54 percent of India's population is considered poor by this index, an average of only six percent of the population of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are consider poor. [39] Nevertheless, given the geo-strategic location of the Central Asian Republics, India will continue its development cooperation with the region as illustrated by the Connect Central Asia Policy, unveiled at the first India-Central Asia Dialogue held in June 2012. [40]

GRANT

Since 2004, Indian development assistance to Central Asian Republics has been through limited grant funding and humanitarian assistance measures. While Indian grants to the CAR have remained approximately at the same level, lending to the region as a percentage of India's overall development cooperation has diminished from 1.2 percent in 2008 to 0.4 percent in 2013.[41]

Within the limited funding that India allocates to the Central Asian Republics, grants are not equitably allocated to all five countries. Between 2008 and 2013, 69 percent of the total

Figure 1: Volume and percentage of grants from India to the CARs, 2008 to 2013



Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

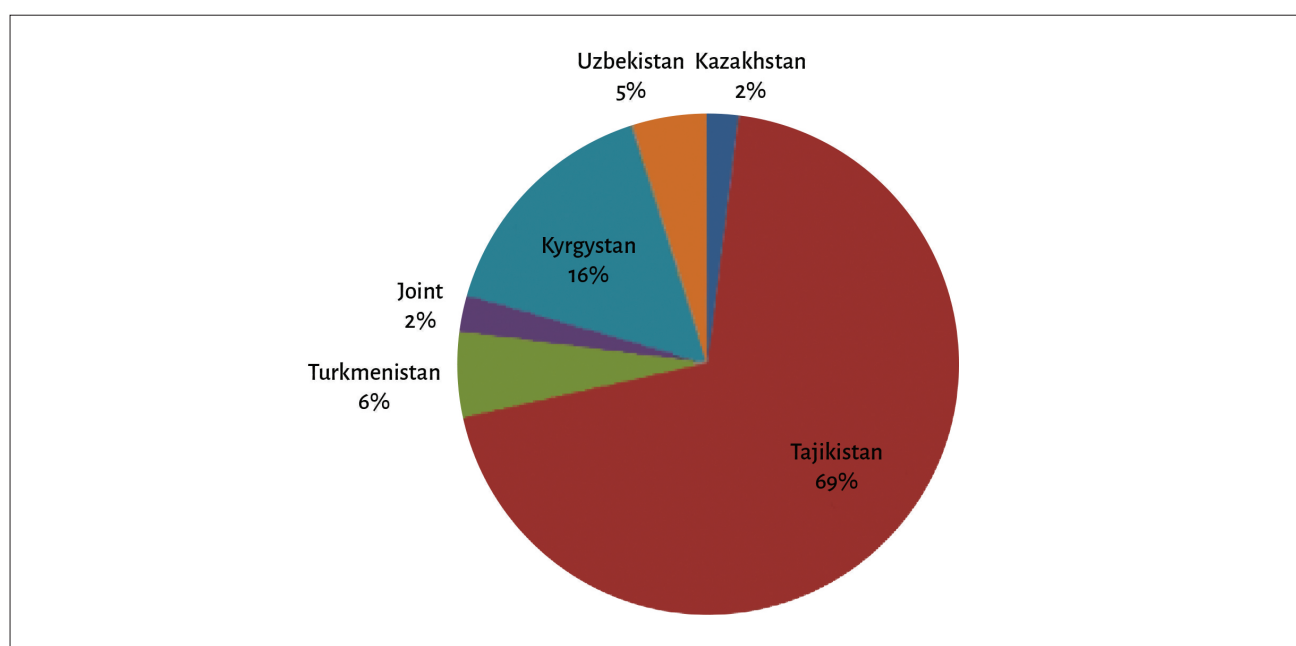
grants to the region were committed to Tajikistan.[42] These grants to Tajikistan have included funding to rehabilitate and modernise the Varzob-1 Hydro Power Plant through the Indian Public Sector Units Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC). To be opened in 2011, the hydro power station was finally inaugurated in 2012 with a capacity increase from 2x3.67 MW to 2x4.75 MW.[43] This hydropower project has received about 47 percent of the total committed grants to CAR.[44] In addition, Tajikistan received a grant to set up basic training and to enhance local skill development through a tool room training centre that was inaugurated in 2012. As a result of the combined focus on hydro-energy and skill development between 2008 and 2013, Tajikistan received a total of over US\$ 27 million in grants from India, positioning Tajikistan far ahead of the remaining countries in the region.[45]

The remaining Central Asian countries receive grants for relatively smaller projects. Kyrgyzstan has received 16 percent of the grants to the region, valued at US\$ 6 million, to create potato processing factories and information technology centres in the country.[46] Turkmenistan is the third highest recipient of Indian aid at over US\$ 2 million (or

6 percent of the total grants to CAR) with funding focused on information training centres in the country.[47] And while Uzbekistan receives only five percent of total grants, they are diverse: a total of US\$ 1 million committed to the country between 2008 and 2013 has been utilized towards funding Entrepreneurship Development Centres and tool rooms that provide both business acumen and basic skill development for the country. [48] Uzbekistan has also received over half a million dollars towards medical equipment.[49] Kazakhstan receives only two percent of the grants to the region and these are utilized for tertiary sectors of entrepreneurship and information technology development.[50]

There are plans to set up a medical and educational E-Network for the five countries in the Central Asian region based on the model of the Pan African e-Network,[51] which provides remote medical and educational support to hospitals and universities in African countries. A similar model in the Central Asian region could provide access to more specialized treatments for the people of CAR. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is in the process of preparing a detailed project report for setting up the e-network project in the five republics.[52]

Figure 2: Geographical division of grants to CAR, 2008 - 2013



Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

LINES OF CREDIT

India has not committed significant amounts of Lines of Credit (LOCs) to the Central Asian region. While Government-extended LOCs valued collectively at US\$ 50 million were extended between 1993 and 2003 to the region, only US\$ 20 million have been extended since 2004, after LOCs began to be routed through the EXIM bank,[53] or about 0.2 percent of overall Indian LOCs extended.

Uzbekistan has received most Lines of Credit to the region with two separate LOCs since 1993 each valued at US\$ 10 million.[54] The first extended in 1993 provided capital for imports from India, purchasing of television equipment and setting up joint ventures between the two countries.[55] The second LOC extended after 2004, is yet to be effective owing to Uzbekistan’s reluctance to take on credit liability.

India has extended two LOCs to Turkmenistan. The first LOC, valued at US\$ 10 million, was utilized in 1996-1997 to create food processing and wool processing units.[56] The second LOC was valued at US\$ 5 million and was utilized in 1998 to create a pharmaceutical plant as a joint venture between Turkmenistan and an Indian medical manufacturer,

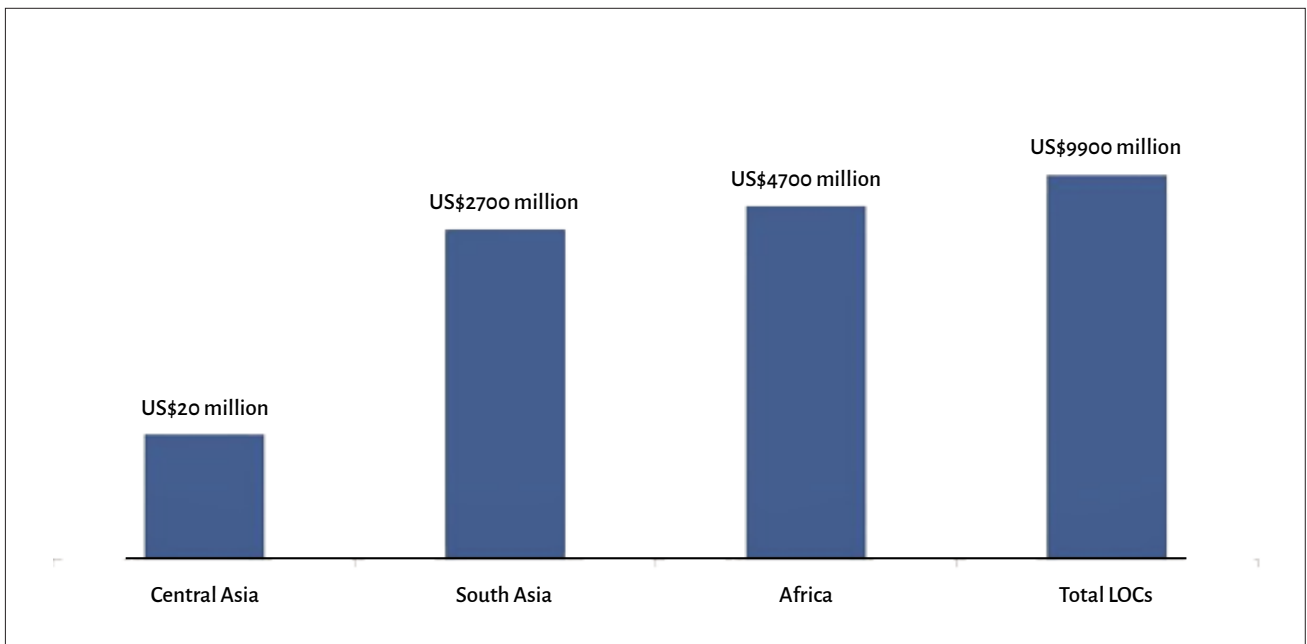
Ajanta Pharma Ltd. The plant commenced operations in Ashgabat in December 1998 and manufactured seventy types of medicines.[57]

Kyrgyzstan has received one LOC in 1995, valued at US\$ 5 million towards financing four manufacturing projects. The factories produced toothbrushes, toothpaste, pharmaceutical products and polythene bags. US\$ 2.78 million dollars were disbursed for this project and the remainder was converted into a grant.[58]

India had provided Tajikistan a LOC of US\$ 5 million in 1995 towards constructing a joint venture with the Indian company Ajanta Pharma, to produce pharmaceutical products. In 2003, the government of India converted the principal along with the accrued interest of US\$ 3.37 million into a grant.[59]

Ajanta Pharma had setup its factories in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by 2003, however, its operations in these four CAR’s became unviable and the company pulled out of its joint ventures in these countries in 2004.[60] Ajanta Pharama did however retain its manufacturing unit in Turkmenistan.

Figure 3: Exim Bank Lines of Credit, 2004-2013 (Logarithmic Scale)



Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

In 2004, the Government of India began to utilize the Export Import Bank of India (EXIM Bank) to channel its LOCs. [61] Since this change, India has disbursed a single line of credit to Kazakhstan worth US\$ 10 million in 2004. Initially, this LOC was to enable export credits from Kazakhstan but was later changed to include all the Commonwealth of Independent States in Central Asia. [62]

INDIAN TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme was started in 1964 as a form of bilateral assistance and capacity building through training programmes, study tours, technology transfers and, in some cases, aid for disaster relief. [63]

Table 1: Number of training slots available offered to Central Asia, 1996 - 2012

Country	1996	2000	2004	2012
Kazakhstan	14	80	60	55
Kyrgyzstan	9	50	65	60
Tajikistan	10	1	100	150
turkmenistan	14	20	32	35
Uzbekistan	18	80	109	150

Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

The CARs have received training through the ITEC programme since the 1990s. [64] The success of the ITEC programme can be inferred from the fact that over 3000 people in the region have availed of the programme since its inception. As Table I highlights, the positive response to the programme has resulted in the Indian government increasing the number of slots allotted to the individual countries. Popular programs include information technology, management, journalism, diplomacy, entrepreneurial programs, banking and the service sector programs. [65] The increased engagement with the region through an inflow of students and professionals from the CARs into India could foster stronger ties between the two regions.

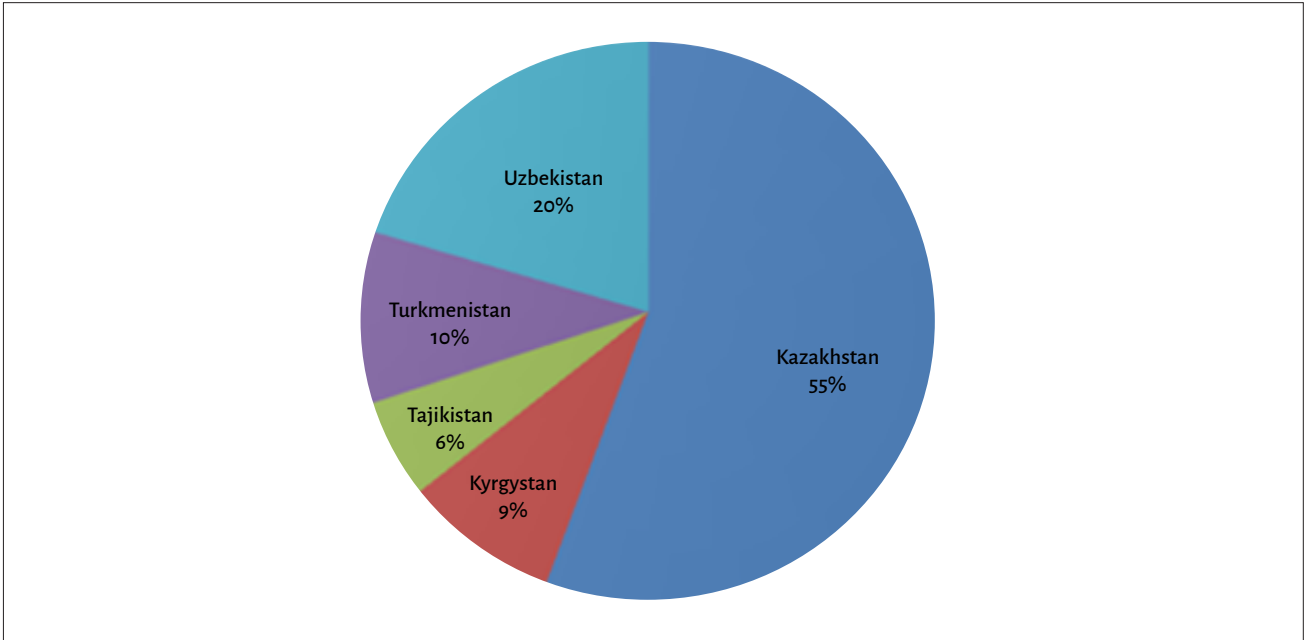
INDIA'S TRADE WITH CENTRAL ASIA

Despite the goodwill that ITEC programs and scholarships have generated, this has failed to translate into substantive

trade and commercial relations between India and Central Asia. At less than US\$ 800 million in 2012-13, [66] trade between Central Asia and India remains below potential. India's lack of a direct overland access to the region due to Pakistan's reluctance in allowing Indian goods to pass through its territory has inhibited India's rising trade interests in the Central Asian region and consequently, trade with the CARs has only risen slowly from US\$ 115 million to US\$ 738 million between 1996 to 2012. [67] Nevertheless, India maintains a positive trade balance with CAR and more than half of India's trade to the Central Asian region is with Kazakhstan (55 percent). This is followed by Uzbekistan (20 percent), Turkmenistan (10 percent), Kyrgyz Republic (9 percent), and Tajikistan (6 percent). [68]

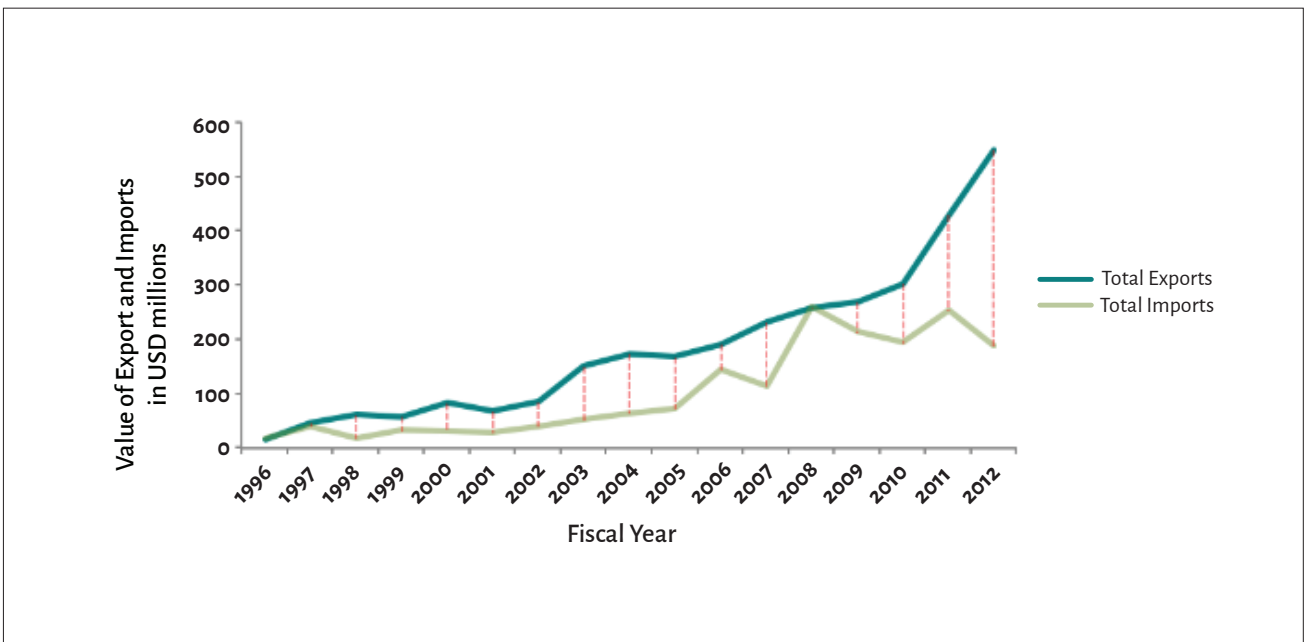
However, although the volume of overall Indian trade with the region remains low, an emergent trend between 2008 to 2013 has been the increase in the export of Indian pharmaceuticals to the region. Growing at 16 percent annually in the CARs, [69] pharmaceutical products now constitute India's primary export to the region. Sold mostly as over-the-counter drugs, India supplies Central Asia with more than 30 percent of its pharmaceutical needs. [70] Imports from Central Asia largely include minerals such as zinc, sulphur and limestone. In addition, India began to import uranium for its civil-nuclear reactors from Kazakhstan through an agreement on Cooperation in Peaceful uses of Nuclear Energy that was signed in 2011. As of 2013, India was planning to import uranium from Uzbekistan. [71] Altogether, while there has been a drop in Indian imports from the region, exports to CAR have been growing.

Figure 4: Indian trade with CAR Countries, 1996-2012



Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

Figure 5: Growth in Indian Imports and Exports, 1996-2012, in USD millions



Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

INDIAN PRIVATE INVESTMENT INTO CENTRAL ASIA

In addition to the low trade volume, between 2008 to 2013, Indian private sector investments in the Central Asian Republics remained limited at a cumulative US\$ 29 million. [72] So far, Indian investments in the region have included recreation, automotive manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and power projects. [73] For example, the Indian company Minda Industries LLC has a joint venture with an Uzbek company to manufacture automotive products. [74] An amusement theme park "Fun and Food Village" in Tashkent was established by the Polo Group, an Indian enterprise in 2011. JPM, an iron and steel manufacturing firm will setup a ferrosilicon manufacturing plant at Kyrgyzstan. IOT Infrastructure and Services is in talks to acquire a majority stake in a Kazakh based company, Kazakhstan Caspi Shelf. [75]

Global private investments into Central Asia have grown from US\$ 3 billion in 2005 to US\$ 19 billion in 2009. [76] Post 2011, however, global private investments to the CAR's declined. This has been the case with Indian private investments to the region as well.

Due to the limited private investments, India's trade volume with the Central Asian region remains low, particularly when compared with the other major regional power, China. China's geographic proximity to the CARs and its aggressive economic clout have helped it emerge as the largest trading partner in four out of the five countries in CAR. [77] China registered an annual trade of US\$ 29 billion with Central Asian countries in 2012, ahead of USA's trade of \$26 billion and Russia's trade of \$27 billion with the region. [78] In addition to geography, Indian trade with the Central Asian region is also hampered by Pakistan's reluctance to allow India's goods to transit through its territory, forcing India to reroute its goods through Iran and Afghanistan. With India's registered annual trade with the CAR falling short of even a billion USD, India punches well below its weight in the region.

FOSTERING STRATEGIC COOPERATION: INDIA'S CONNECT CENTRAL ASIA POLICY

In spite of India's limited trade and investment with Central Asia, this region has gained significance in India's foreign policy over the past decade. The rising importance of this region has been due to the region's strategic importance for India on several fronts: India's pressing energy requirements, CAR's proximity to Afghanistan, and an increased Chinese presence in the region. In December 2012, speaking at an event organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), India's External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid

highlighted that India could soon import 90 percent of its oil and more than half of its gas and coal requirements. [79] Central Asia's energy sources are therefore likely to remain attractive to India. Second, with the 2014 drawdown of international troops in Afghanistan and India's worry that potential ensuing instability could impact Indian security, having friendly relations with Afghanistan's neighbors from the Central Asian Republics to China and Iran, is also in India's security interest. Third, recent Chinese investments have included acquiring key stakes in oil and gas fields in Central Asia. As India makes greater forays in Central Asia's energy sector, there is an increased likelihood of Beijing and New Delhi finding themselves in strategic competition with each other for similar energy resources.

The growing importance of the Central Asian region to Indian foreign policy was illustrated when India unveiled its strategic roadmap - the 'Connect Central Asia' policy in July 2012. [80] Seeking to strengthen bilateral relations and help India emerge as a major player in Central Asia, the Connect Central Asia policy broadly outlines the role that India can undertake in the region. With a coherent development agenda at its nucleus, the policy aims to better integrate the Central Asian Republics with the Indian economic system and contribute to Central Asia's development. This 'Connect Central Asia' policy envisions agrarian assistance, use of India's IT knowledge base, closer military ties, infrastructure development, initiatives in higher education and building of hospitals with requisite medical assistance as the key sectors for Indian engagement. For example, the policy seeks to establish a Central Asian e-network that would aid capacity building in the health and education sectors of Central Asia [81] by connecting Indian hospitals and universities to Central Asia to undertake tele-medicine and tele-education projects. The policy also envisions setting up a Central university in the region. This phase of Indian engagement aims at a project-driven approach that could result in an increase in the volume of Indian grants to the Central Asian Republics.

The policy also recognizes that an associated but key aspect to its success would be the development of Afghanistan as a hub to transport Indian goods via sea and from ports in Iran through Afghanistan into the Central Asian republics. Iran's Chabahar port, located in the Gulf of Oman, and the port at Bandar Abbas near the Strait of Hormuz will serve as potential entry points for transporting goods into Afghanistan [82] and through Afghanistan to Central Asia. [83] In May 2013, India allocated US\$ 100 million to develop the Chabahar port. Additionally a trilateral draft pact between India, Iran and Afghanistan to develop the Chabahar port is actively under consideration. A rail-link from Chabahar to Zaranj in Afghanistan is also under

discussion with Iran as India seeks to have a more viable access route to Central Asia.[84] India is also involved in ongoing talks with Iran to complete unfinished portions of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) [85] linking Iran with the Afghan border resulting in shorter transit time for goods bound for Central Asia. The Russia-India-Iran initiated INSTC will thereafter connect to the Zaranj-Delaram Road (constructed by India in 2009) in Afghanistan and link with the Afghan ring road highway that connects to important cities in Afghanistan, some of which are close to the Central Asian Republics.[86] Apart from establishing a secure route for Indian goods to reach markets in Central Asia, these initiatives could bode well for India's energy imports from Central Asia.

CHINA AND INDIA: A JOINT ROAD AHEAD?

Since securing energy imports from Central Asia is important to India, India's hitherto sparse forays into Central Asia are unlikely to serve India well, considering an energy-hungry China has aggressively and often successfully sought lucrative oil and gas contracts and has also set up critical import infrastructure in Central Asia.[87] So far, Indian forays have remained not only limited, but also protracted. For example, while gas is imported from Turkmenistan to China's provinces through Chinese-constructed pipelines,[88] Indian negotiations with Turkmenistan for a similar gas pipeline - the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline – have remained stuck for almost two decades. While some progress was made on the TAPI pipeline in 2013 with the four nations agreeing to form a company to take the project forward,[89] in general China seems to exert greater influence with the Central Asian nations,[90] while India remains unable to increase its commercial, and strategic leverage within the region.

India and China both view the Central Asian region as a source of potential energy resources and are competitors in this sector. However, on the political front both countries want closer political relations with the Central Asian countries and want to work together to foster a more coordinated foreign policy approach to Central Asia. In order to address the shared political and economic interests in the region, India and China held a bilateral dialogue in Beijing in August 2013. This meeting of high level officials from both countries underscored the possibility of India and China working together to address their respective priorities

in Central Asia.[91] During the dialogue, issues such as regional security and counter-terrorism, India's role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), energy security, development partnerships, and people-to-people contacts with the Central Asian republics were discussed, as were India's and China's respective foreign policies towards the Central Asian region. Both countries jointly acknowledged that the Central Asian region was emerging as a foreign policy priority for them.[92] Recognizing such converging interests opens the way for stronger coordinated efforts between the India and China in the Central Asian region.

CONCLUSION

Given India's rising foreign policy interests in Central Asia, Indian development cooperation with Central Asia is likely to grow. Closer development cooperation between India and Central Asian countries would prove beneficial to both, since Central Asia could access appropriate technologies and knowledge from India and India could access the rich natural resources and upcoming markets in the region. For example, through projects such as the TAPI pipeline, India can hope for a greater role in tying Central Asia to South Asia. Projects such as the TAPI pipeline would also allow the CARs – including isolationist Turkmenistan - brighter opportunities for economic development.[93]

Aside from the advantages a more engaged India offers Central Asia, for India, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan's continued support for India's bid for full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its lobbying for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC)[94] serves as a welcome indication that many in the region wish to see India play a significantly bigger role. India's efforts to capitalize on such attitudes will almost certainly bode well for its broader strategic and development cooperation aspirations.

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2. For instance under Tamerlane in the 14th century.
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9. Ibid. These included projects given to the Indian companies Tata and Larsen and Turbo to to construct luxury hotels in Uzbekistan.
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