

India – Turkmenistan Relations

Turkmenistan, one of the Republics of the former USSR, was proclaimed as an independent State on 27 October 1991. It shares borders with Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan in the north and North-east, Iran in the South and Afghanistan in the Southeast. It has an area of 488,100 square kms and stretches 650 kms from north to south and 1,100 km from east to west. The main river of Turkmenistan is Amu Darya, which enters the country from Afghanistan and flows along the north-eastern borders before it enters Uzbekistan. The Karakum canal carries the waters of Amu Darya across the desert from the East to the West and is the main source of drinking water and irrigation. Turkmenistan is mostly covered with desert (about 80%). Some of the earliest cities in the world were developed here. Most interesting landmarks in Turkmenistan are ruins of ancient cities and fortresses. Hundreds of hills and crumbling ruins all over the country testify that this country had a great and interesting path. These were not just common cities: Merv was one of world's largest ancient cities in the beginning of the 13th century and Urgench was a major centre of culture, influencing architecture and art in the whole of Central Asia.

India enjoys close, friendly and historical ties with Turkmenistan. 'Turkman Gate' built in Delhi in 1650s bears testimony to this friendship. Prime Minister Nehru visited Ashgabat in June 1955. Indian films and TV serials are popular here with Turkmen people. Similarly, Indian music also holds a special place in the hearts of Turkmen people.

Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi visited Turkmenistan from 10 to 11 July 15 as part of his Central Asia tour. It was a historic visit given that an Indian Prime Minister had visited Turkmenistan after 20 years. He had tete-a-tete with Turkmen President followed by delegation level talks and signing of documents on 11 July and thereafter both leaders issued a joint statement. Hon'ble PM also inaugurated the Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre in Ashgabat, the first of its kind in the region, unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi and interacted with students of Azadi University of Foreign Languages who are learning Hindi.

TAPI (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan– India) gas pipeline project has made steady progress since the TAPI Summit was held in Ashgabat in December 2010. On 13 November, 2014 the four state gas companies of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India established a company that will build, own and operate the planned 1,800-kilometer Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline. The company has been incorporated as a Special Purpose Vehicle in the Isle of Man and has been named TAPI Pipeline Company.

The 22nd Steering Committee Meeting of TAPI was held in Ashgabat on 06 August, 2015. Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) Petroleum & Natural Gas, Govt. of India led the Indian delegation at the TAPI Steering Committee Meeting from 06-08 August, 2015. Turkmenistan offered to lead the Consortium which was agreed to unanimously by all the other three members.

The 23rd Steering Committee Meeting of TAPI was held in Ashgabat on 24 October, 2015. Shri Kapil Dev Tripathi, Secretary, MoPNG led the Indian delegation. After the meeting the Shareholders Agreement was initialled among the parties. India agreed to take 5% stake in the project.

OVL is in the process of opening its office in Ashgabat to pursue India's interests in TAPI gas pipeline project.

TAPI Ground Breaking Ceremony was held on 13 December 2015 in Mary and thereafter, the implementation of the first phase of TAPI is expected to start on Turkmen side till Afghan border (215 kms).

Major visits from India - Major visits from India include visit of Prime Minister Shri P.V. NarasimhaRao, 19-21 Sept 1995; EAM ShriJaswant Singh - May 1999; MOS(P&NG) ShriDinsha Patel 13-15 Feb 2006; MOS(EA) ShriE.Ahamed- 1-4 Oct 2006 & 14 Feb 2007; Minister of Water Resources ShriSaifuddinSoz, 23-25 Dec 2006; Vice President Shri Hamid Ansari, 4-6 April 2008 ; EAM Shri S.M. Krishna 18-19 Sept.2009; MOS (PK) Smt. PreneetKaur, 8-9 Feb.2010, MOS(P&NG) ShriJitinPrasada, 19-20 Sept.2010; Minister (P&NG) ShriMurliDeora, 10-12 Dec.2010; MOS (Communications & IT) Shri Sachin Pilot, 16-18 October, 2011; Minister (P&NG) Shri S. Jaipal Reddy, 22-24 May 2012; Minister (Communications & IT) ShriKapilSibal, 16-19 September 2012; Minister (P&NG) Dr. M. VeerappaMoily, 9 July, 2013; ShriPaban Singh Ghatowar, Minister of State (Parl. Affairs) 26-28 October, 2013 and Shri A.K. Antony, Hon'bleRakshaMantri made a transit halt at Ashgabat airport on 18 November 2013 and ShriDharmendraPradhan, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) Petroleum & Natural Gas, Govt. of India led an Indian delegation to attend the TAPI Steering Committee Meeting held in Ashgabat on 20 November, 2014. EAM Smt. SushmaSwaraj held bilateral meetings with Turkmen President GurbangulyBerdimuhamedov on 12 September 2014 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on the sidelines of the 14th Heads of State Summit of the SCO where he was a guest. EAM Smt. SushmaSwaraj visited Ashgabat from 7-9 April 2015 for the 5th IGC held in Ashgabat on 8 April 2015, EAMmade transit halts at Ashgabat on 19 and 21 October on her way to Moscow and back,Hon'ble Prime Minister, MrNarendraModi from 10 to 11 July 2015 and Hon'ble Vice President from 11-13 December, 2015.

Major visits to India- President SaparmyratNiyazov, 18-20 April 1992 & 25-26 February 1997; Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov 02-04 December 1992, Dy. Prime Minister & Foreign Minister 18-20 April 1995, 7-8 April 1997 and April 2000; Dy. Prime Minister & Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, 20-22 January 2008; President GurbangulyBerdimuhamedov, 24-26 May 2010; Minister Oil & Gas Industry B. Nedirov, 28 April 2011; Deputy Minister of Defence JepbarAkyev, 29 May-4 June 2011; Deputy Chairman of Parliament Ms.GurbangulBayramova, 3-4 October 2012; Acting Minister of Oil/Gas Industry K. Abdullaev, 14-17 October 2012; Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, 21-22 January 2013 and Deputy Prime Minister (Oil & Gas) Mr. BaymuratHojamammedov 21 July, 2015.

Education

India provides ITEC training for Turkmen nationals in India. In the year 2015-16, 20 ITEC slots were offered to them. In all, since the inception of the programme for Turkmenistan in 1994, a total of 345 Turkmen nationals have been trained in various courses.

India provides ICCR Scholarships to students from Turkmenistan. 20 ICCR scholarships are offered every year. There are approximately 100 Students from Turkmenistan pursuing various courses.

Trade

Total trade for the year 2014-15 stood at US\$ 105.03 million. Of this, exports from India stood at US\$ 91.98 million and imports by India at US\$ 13.05 million with India registering a trade surplus of US\$ 78.93 million in its favour. Major items of import from India include electronic and electrical items (LG products made in India), machinery and woven apparel and pharmaceuticals, frozen meat and tyres. Exports to India comprises of raw hides and inorganic chemicals (e.g. Iodine).

Bilateral trade in (in million US\$)

Year	Indian exports	Indian imports	Total Turnover
2010-11	26.16	9.73	35.89
2011-12	43.95	16.89	60.84
2012-13	69.92	8.33	78.25
2013-14	73.63	14.10	87.73
2012-13	69.92	8.33	78.25
2013-14	73.63	14.10	87.73
2014-15	91.98	13.05	105.03

According to Turkmen side, the bilateral trade was at USD 185 million in 2014.

An India Tourism seminar titled 'Incredible India Road Show' was held in Ashgabat on 22 September 2015 to highlight tourism potential of India to travel operators in Turkmenistan

Fertilisers

India and Turkmenistan explored the opportunities in petro-chemical sector and it was agreed to strengthen cooperation in this sector. A Memorandum of Understanding between 'Turkmenhimiya' (Turkmen Chemicals) and Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers on the supply of chemical products was signed in Ashgabat on 11 July 2015 during Hon'ble PM's visit.

Air links with Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan Airlines operates 8 flights a week to India – 2 direct flights to New Delhi (Saturday and Sunday) and 6 flights to Amritsar (all days except Friday).

Cultural relations

Programme of Cooperation between the Government of Turkmenistan and Government of India in the Fields of Science, Education, Culture, Art, Tourism, Sport and Mass Media, signed on 25 May 2010 in New Delhi for initial 2 years (2010-2012) was extended by another 2 years till 31 December 2014 and was renewed for further 2 years till 31 December 2016 under same existing terms and conditions.

A 10-member cultural troupe from Natya STEM Dance Kompany visited Turkmenistan from 16-19 October, 2015 and held cultural shows in Ashgabat and Mary to showcase Indian classical dance movements and aesthetic sensibilities to create a contemporary Indian dance vocabulary.

Indian community in Turkmenistan

There are presently 534 Indian nationals in Turkmenistan. Indians in Turkmenistan are spread over- Ashgabat – 115, Mary – 80, Balkan- 303, Ahal – 16 and, Lebap- 20. Majority of these are semi-skilled workers in the oil & gas sector as well as in construction sector. There are also a few engineers, junior engineers and technicians working in oil and gas sector. No Indians are settled in Turkmenistan as the local law does not permit citizenship to any foreigners. Therefore, there is no Indian Diaspora as such, in Turkmenistan. There has been a decline in number of Indian workers due to the completion of certain projects of foreign companies for which the Indians were working. There are no Indian Associations or Indian students in Turkmenistan.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Ashgabat website:

<http://www.eoi.gov.in/ashgabat>

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