

## 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 2015. 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 remains active 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. During the 22<sup>nd</sup> Steering Committee Meeting of TAPI, Turkmenistan offered to lead the Consortium which was agreed to unanimously by

all the other three members. TAPI Ground Breaking Ceremony was held in Mary on 13 December 2015 marking the beginning of first phase of TAPI Gas Pipeline laying ceremony on Turkmen side till Afghan border (215 kms). On 22 February 2018, Shri M. J. Akbar, formerly Minister of State for External Affairs had represented India at the inauguration ceremony held in Islim Cheshme near Serhatabat close to Turkmen-Afghan border.

Yoga continues to be one of the most powerful links for boosting India's bilateral cultural relations with Turkmenistan. The 4<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga was celebrated at the Yoga & Traditional Centre at Bagtyarlyk Sports Complex in Ashgabat on 17 June 2018 with full enthusiasm. Besides 700 regular Yoga practitioners, members of the Diplomatic Community, Indian Community & students of State Medical University participated in the event. Deputy Minister of Healthcare & Industry of Turkmenistan had graced the occasion on 2018. Of the 2800 registered Yoga practitioners about 2100 are practising Yoga on weekly basis. The two credit course of 'Yoga Therapy' continues to be held at the State Medical University with the help of Indian Yoga teachers.

Gandhi Jayanthi was celebrated with garlanding and laying of flowers on the bust of Mahatma Gandhi located in the Yoga & Traditional Medicine Centre in Ashgabat. A quiz program, a photo exhibition and two documentaries on Mahatma Gandhi were screened in the Embassy premises where 30 students learning Hindi at Azadi Institute of World Languages participated enthusiastically. A video on Mahatma Gandhi and the recordings of 'Vaishnav Jan to.....' were displayed on the façade of the chancery building.

Ekta Diwas was celebrated on 31 October 2018 with Ambassador administering the National Unity pledge. Later floral tributes were paid to Sardar Patel. The ceremony was concluded with screening of a documentary depicting the life and accomplishments of Sardar Patel.

India was invited to join the 'Ashgabat Agreement' which envisages establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor between the Governments of Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. India has been admitted to 'Ashgabat Agreement' w.e.f. 3 February 2018 on the Establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor with the consent of the Member countries.

**Major visits from India** - Major visits from India include visit of Prime Minister Shri P.V. NarasimhaRao, 19-21 Sept 1995; Vice President Shri Hamid Ansari, 4-6 April 2008; EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj held bilateral meetings with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on 12 September 2014 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on the sidelines of the

14<sup>th</sup> Heads of State Summit of the SCO where he was a guest. EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited Ashgabat from 7-9 April 2015 for the 5<sup>th</sup> IGC held in Ashgabat on 8 April 2015, Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi from 10 to 11 July 2015 and Hon'ble Vice President Shri Hamid Ansari from 11-13 December, 2015; Shri Arun Jaitley, Raksha Mantri transited through Ashgabat on June 20 2017 during his visit to Moscow. Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship participated in the inauguration Ceremony of the V Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games (AIMAG) on September 17, 2017. Shri M.J.Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs visited Ashgabat from November 14-15 2017 to participate at the VII Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA VII). On November 26 & 29, Shri Rajnath Singh, Hon'ble Home Minister transited via Ashgabat Airport on his way to Moscow & during his return to New Delhi. On 2 August 2018 Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister transited via Ashgabat Airport on her way to Moscow to a 3 nation visit to Central Asian Countries. On 30 September 2018 DG Doordarshan visited Ashgabat for Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union General Assembly. On 13 and 15 September 2018 Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister transited via Ashgabat Airport on her way to Moscow & during her return to New Delhi.

**Major visits to India-** President Saparmyrat Niyazov, 18-20 April 1992 & 25-26 February 1997; 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 Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, 24-26 May 2010; Deputy Minister of Defence Jepbar Akyyev, 29 May-4 June 2011; Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, 21-22 January 2013 and Deputy Prime Minister (Oil & Gas) Mr. Baymurat Hojamammedov 21 July, 2015. First DFM Vepa Hajiyev led a delegation to New Delhi from 17-18 March, 2016 for the Foreign Office Consultations. Mr. Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan visited Amritsar on December 3-4, 2016 to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference on "Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process". He visited New Delhi again August 13, 2017 & met EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Shri Venkaiah Naidu, Vice President of India, Shri Arun Jaitley, Minister of Finance, Shri Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport, Highways Navigation & Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas. Mr. Mammetmyrat Geldinyazov, Turkmen Minister of Education, accompanied by an officer, participated in the Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention (MGISC) in New Delhi on 30 September 2018.

## **Education**

Hindi language is being taught to about 50 students each year at the Azadi Institute of world languages in Ashgabat. An Ayurveda Therapist is conducting classes in Turkmen State Medical University since February 2018.

India provides ITEC training for Turkmen nationals in India. In the year 2018-19, 30 ITEC slots have been offered to them. In all, since the inception of the programme for Turkmenistan in 1994, a total of 404 Turkmen nationals have been trained in various ITEC courses.

India provides ICCR Scholarships to students from Turkmenistan. 20 ICCR scholarships are offered every year. There are approximately 300 Turkmen Students pursuing various courses in India.

## **Trade**

Total trade for the year 2017-18 stood at US\$ 80.46 million. Of this, exports from India stood at US\$ 54.31 million and imports by India at US\$ 26.15 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
2012-13	69.92	8.33	78.25
2013-14	73.63	14.10	87.73
2014-15	91.98	13.05	105.03
2015-16	63.30	46.09	109.39
2016-17	57.75	21.32	79.07
2017-18	54.31	26.15	80.46

India and Turkmenistan have been exploring opportunities for cooperation in petro-chemical sector. A Memorandum of Understanding between 'Turkmenhimiya' (Turkmen Chemicals) and Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers on the supply of chemical products was signed during Hon'ble Prime Minister's visit to Ashgabat on 11 July 2015.

A five member Turkmen Automobile delegation visited New Delhi & Pune from 8-12 July 2018 for exploring opportunities in automobiles sector. They interacted with representatives from TATA motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti & Hero MotoCorp, etc.

15 Indian Pharmaceutical companies participated in the International Health 'Expo 2018' on 20-23 July 2018 and a 26 member Pharmexcil delegation from India visited Ashgabat from 24-28 November 2018 to further explore business opportunities in Pharmaceutical sector.

### **Air links with Turkmenistan**

As per current schedule, Turkmenistan Airlines operates 9 flights a week to India – 3 direct flights to New Delhi (Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday) and 6 flights to Amritsar. There is no flight operating from Ashgabat to Amritsar on Friday and from Amritsar to Ashgabat on Thursday. The flights to and from Amritsar carry passengers from and to the UK with a stop over in Ashgabat.

### **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. The cultural ties with Turkmenistan were further strengthened with the visit of a three member Tabla group participating at the International Scientific Conference & the festival "Ancient Cradle of Musical Arts" organized by the Ministry of Culture of Turkmenistan on 18-19 April 2018 in Ashgabat. It received further impetus with the performance of an ICCR sponsored 14 Member Bollywood group in Ashgabat on 30-31 August 2018 in celebration of India@70. Deputy Minister of Culture of Turkmenistan had graced the occasion.

### **Indian community in Turkmenistan**

There are presently about 412 Indian nationals in Turkmenistan. Indians in Turkmenistan are spread over- Ashgabat – 228, Mary – 47, Balkan- 118, Ahal – 9 and, Lebap- 10. Majority of these are semi-skilled workers in the oil & gas and in the 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. There is no Indian Diaspora 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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