

HIS EXCELLENCE
SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV
A VISIONARY STATESMAN



A Collection of Research Articles by
CENTER FOR GLOBAL & STRATEGIC STUDIES (CGSS), ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

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FOREWORD



The ancient Silk Road passed through Central and South Asia, and several empires ruled large portions of this part of the world for centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the areas of Central-South Asia were under colonial rule. However, with the end of World War II, major developments happened in the world. First, the formation of the United Nations (UN) on 24 October 1945. Second, the disintegration of the Soviets Union (USSR) in 1991. Third, the formation of the European Union (EU) on 1st November 1993.

Fourth, in 2013, China announced its exceptional Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) for inclusive economic development and connect countries worldwide to work for a community with a shared future for mankind. **The fifth grand development that the world has witness is the idea of Central and South Asia regional connectivity (2021) proposed by the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev.** The initiative of Central and South Asian regional cooperation has emerged as a significant development in reinvigorating centuries-old traditional and cultural linkages between countries. **This grand initiative would be a game-changer for both regions, thus making His Excellency President Shavkat Mirziyoyev a Visionary Statesman.**

Wider regional alignments have vast potential to accelerate economic growth, reduce poverty, and economic disparity within and across the countries involved, and address common challenges. In the 21st century, the advanced mechanism in international relations has been going through a profound transformation and evolutionary development. Connectivity is a cornerstone of regional economic cooperation and integration and has become a major priority. Information sharing and inclusive economic development projects contribute to establishing a cohesive global community of states countering common issues. Along with the explicit benefits these processes bring, fundamental pillars of the new regionalism are institutions that provide integrated platforms to the countries. It builds qualitatively modern forms of interactions. The changing dynamics of regional and international political discourse allow nations to enhance cooperation in multiple fields.

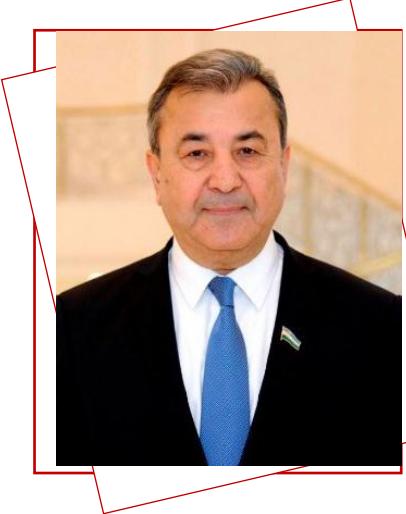
In this regard, the grand initiative of Central and South Asian regional connectivity by His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has proved to be a milestone development for regional integration. Pakistan and Uzbekistan enjoy cordial relations, and bilateral ties have been strengthening via multilateral collaboration and persistent diplomatic engagements. Both countries embarked on a new journey of prosperity, enhancing bilateral cooperation, joint ventures for regional peace and stability, and strengthening economic and strategic partnerships. Moreover, the official visit of His Excellency, Prime Minister, Imran Khan to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, for the two-day international conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Interconnectedness. Challenges and Opportunities (15-16 July 2021) significantly contributed to the existing bilateral relations. His Excellency, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, provided significant ten-points agenda to enhance regional cooperation and combat challenges in the international conference. **I am highly inspired by the ten-proposals given by the visionary statesman, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. I would also like to appreciate and acknowledge Former Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, His Excellency Furqat A. Sidikov (Deputy Foreign Minister, Republic of Uzbekistan). He has done extremely well in his tenure and still enhancing efforts to integrate Pakistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, His Excellency Aybek Arif Usmanov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Pakistan is also doing great efforts to promote Central-South Asian connectivity and also playing a key role in the enhancement of bilateral relations between the two countries.** Pakistan’s connectivity with Uzbekistan is vital. Improved trade/commerce activities with Uzbekistan would open new avenues of regional prosperity and development. We hope that this book will contribute to policymakers, civil society, academia, think tanks, and others interested in advancing regional cooperation, people-to-people contacts, and academic linkages between Central and South Asia.



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SPECIAL MESSAGE BY HIS EXCELLENCE DR. SODYQ SAFOEV, FIRST DEPUTY OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE OF THE OLIV MAJLIS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

UZBEKISTAN IN THE NEW SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



There is no doubt that over the past five years one of the biggest changes in the modern world is the emergence of a New Uzbekistan. And there is no doubt that is the direct outcome of the courageous changes initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who set forth a new paradigm of development for the country. Uzbekistan has started restoring its historical place in the world civilization and laying down the foundations for a Third Renaissance. A decisive factor of this revival

is the newly obtained openness to the world.

At the heart of the previous renaissances was the emergence of a common economic, cultural, humanitarian space in a vast region. Long-distance trade played a major role in the rise and prosperity of Central Asia. The Great Silk Road served not only as a means of trading goods, but also as an exchange of cultures, ideas, scientific discoveries, bridging distant nations and civilizations.

Hence, the foreign policy of the new Uzbekistan is aiming at cultivating multidirectional dialogue and cooperation in foreign relations - with the East and West, North and South. A monumental achievement of Uzbekistan within the years of independence has been the fact that the country earned itself a worthy place in the world community as a truly sovereign and important state.

From the beginning, it has pursued consistent and firm foreign policy and it became clear that Uzbekistan, by virtue of its political, economic, civilizational, human potentials is an influential force in the international arena. It is unambiguously recognized that Uzbekistan is a country with a special role and mission in an important region - Central Asia and beyond.

New style of Uzbek diplomacy has emerged.

Immediately after his election, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev instigated systemic high-level regional dialogue. It enabled to create a fundamentally new political atmosphere in Central Asia and was highly acknowledged by the world community.

The main goal of Tashkent's new regional policy is to turn Central Asia into a zone of stability and sustainable development, to create an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect and good-neighbourliness. In recent four years, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with our neighbours has increased fivefold.

At the same time, the situation in our region and around the world is changing rapidly.

This requires a continuous and corresponding adjustment in countries' foreign policy.

On the one hand, globalization has opened up strategic opportunities to increase economic efficiency and human development. On the other, issues such as transnational threats to peace and stability, environmental pollution, uncontrolled mass migration, and many other have arisen.

What are the foreign policy priorities of Uzbekistan in the years to come?

First, it is important to consolidate the existing positive trends in the region, to make the process of strengthening mutual trust and broad-based cooperation in Central Asia irreversible.

Second, it is extremely important to continue the active involvement of Afghanistan in the regional and global processes.

Third, the top priority should be green diplomacy. Its essence lies in the promotion of international initiatives and the implementation of multilateral programs in the field of environmental protection and solving the growing environmental problems of the region and the world.

Fourth, we all are well aware of the fundamental change in international relations. The current poly-centricity of the world order requires a different paradigm of its development.

Fifth, the rich resource of "people's diplomacy" should be utilized more actively. Cultural, scientific and educational programs must be systematic. These will contribute to the formation and strengthening of trust between peoples.

Today, when the role of parliaments is growing all over the world, we are more than ever realize the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. The legislative bodies can and should contribute to strengthening mutual trust, achieving greater understanding, and shaping the legal framework of relations. The bodies elected by peoples and representing the will of people are supposed to give the due depth to bilateral cooperation.

SPECIAL MESSAGE BY HIS EXCELLENCY FURKAT SIDIKOV, DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

A NEW ERA OF MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONS WITH SOUTH ASIA



Uzbekistan has celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence in an environment where large-scale reforms, openness, peace and consistency of its pragmatic foreign policy are recognized by the international community.

The principles of openness, innovation and renewal, liberalization, development of market relations, improvement of the business environment, digitalization, introduction of new technologies, education and enlightenment, civic activism and attention to human rights in all spheres of life have a positive impact on our country's international relations. The spirit of trust and aspiration for cooperation with Uzbekistan is growing.

The period of consistent reforms under the leadership of the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev is described by representatives of international scientific and expert circles as a new stage in the development of Uzbekistan. The spirit of renewal and the scale of changes introduced in various spheres in the New Uzbekistan in this short period serves to the rapid development of the state and society, to increase the welfare of the people and to strengthen the tranquillity.

From the very first day in office, our President has embarked on a systemic regional dialogue at a high level, thus creating a new political atmosphere in Central Asia, recognized by the international community.

Uzbekistan's new policy of openness and friendship encourages foreign countries, including the states of South Asia, to take a new approach to Uzbekistan and further develop cooperation in various fields. It is safe to say that in recent years there has been a sharp shift in the relations of South Asia countries with Uzbekistan.

This is manifested by the international conference “Central and South Asia: regional connectivity. Challenges and opportunities” (July 15-16, Tashkent), which was organized by the initiative of the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev as part of a new open foreign policy strategy. The aim of the conference was to further deepen economic cooperation in Central Asia, with access to South Asia, which has been closely linked to the region historically.

This conference gave a strong impetus to the development of trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian ties between two regions.

President Sh.Mirziyoyev in his speech at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly emphasized that Uzbekistan attached priority to strengthening the interactions with neighboring and contiguous regions.

In this regard, our president put forward a proposal to adopt a special Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on strengthening the interconnectivity of Central and South Asia.

Uzbekistan considers Afghanistan as an integral part of Central Asia. It is not only Uzbekistan and the neighboring states, but also the whole world is interested in the establishment of peace and tranquility in this country.

Therefore, Uzbek government is always doing his best to help the Afghan people. Uzbekistan is ready to further assist Afghanistan in rebuilding the country, establishing long-term strong peace and achieving national consensus.

President Mirziyoyev also paid particular attention to the issue of building a transport and logistics infrastructure that would effectively and safely connect Central Asia and South Asia and make a great contribution to the socio-economic development of Afghanistan, maintaining peace and stability in the entire region. The construction of the “Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar” railway will be an essential link in this architecture. It fully reveals the transit potential of the two regions, significantly reducing the distance and time of transportation.

I am confident that the active and constructive dialogue between the countries of Central and South Asia will open up the new opportunities for fuller accomplishment of their potential.

MESSAGE BY HIS EXCELLENCY OYBEK ARIF USMANOV, AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN TO PAKISTAN

Assalom aleykum wa rahmatulla wa barakatohy



I am honored to express my sincerest gratitude to CGSS, the Public Policy Institute of Pakistan with a mission to help improve policy and decision-making through analysis and research.

I am extremely impressed with how well written and researched the article proved to be on the historical meaning of the connectivity - the great initiative of the century designed and well promoted by H.E. President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Under his vision a new format of high-level meetings – the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of the Central Asian countries was created for strengthening political confidence and mutual solidarity in Central Asia. As a result, a completely new political environment has been created in the region.

The very next well calculated and important step of Uzbek Leader was development of win-win policy and close partnership in political sphere, trade and industrial cooperation with the countries of South Asia.

Thus in July 2021 in Tashkent the farsighted vision of the President of Uzbekistan has been practically shaped during the Central-South Asian regional connectivity international conference where the Leaders of Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan and the high level delegations from more than 50 countries and 30 international organizations had attended.

All participants has agreed with the strategy of the Uzbek President H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev that “without tighter relationships and economic connectivity we cannot run this part of the world and the Eurasian continent into stable and prosperous space”.

The high level international Forum stressed once again that H.E.President Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s active foreign policy can help and expand trade and economic partnership

by reopening the borders and addressing the regional problems most notably the challenging situation in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan firmly believes that it is a high time – proceeding from an enormous historical, scientific and spiritual-cultural heritage of our peoples, the complementarity of economies and intellectual capacity to consolidate our joint efforts.

That's why it's indeed a great contribution towards rejuvenating Central and South Asian regional cooperation through the book compiled by Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS). Pakistan has already aided a great deal of Uzbekistan's initiative "Reinvigorating Central and South Asian Regional Connectivity".

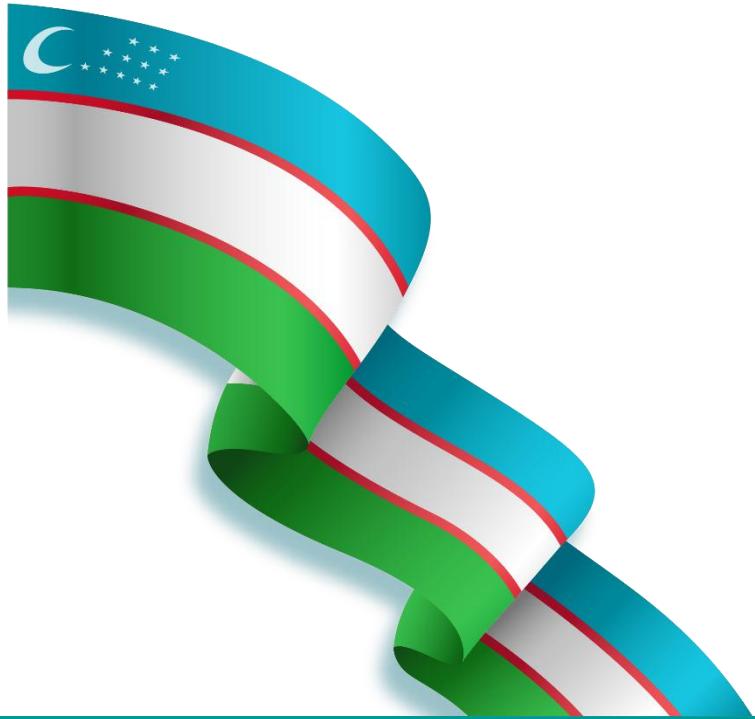
CGSS has been proactively working to integrate regional countries, promote academic cooperation and enhance people-to-people contacts through its strong research and development projects.

In addition, CGSS has been well supporting the many crucial initiatives and projects encouraged by the great legacy of the outstanding scientists and thinkers as Brahmagupta and Al-Khorezmi, Al-Fergani and Al-Farabi, Abu Raihan Biruni and Ibn Sina.

The legacy of prominent thinkers and classics of our national literatures as Khosrow Dehlavi, Alisher Navoi, Abdurakhman Jami, Alloma Iqbal, Mirzo Golib, Mahtumkuli, Abay, Rabindranat Tagore, Sadreddin Ayni are well-known all over the world and we consider it as common legacy of our nations.

Let me express my gratitude to leaders and professional team of the CGSS for this good opportunity to share the New Uzbekistan Leader's farsighted approaches on the matters of regional connectivity making an contribution to the development of ideas of peace, freedom and humanism, friendship and mutual understanding among our nations.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude especially to Mr. Khalid Taimur Akram, Executive Director, CGSS, who has been credibly working to enhance Central-South Asian regional cooperation proposed by H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, extended valuable support to his initiatives for years to come whilst strengthening Pakistan and Uzbekistan bilateral ties.



Part I

**UZBEKISTAN UNDER THE DYNAMIC
LEADERSHIP OF HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT
SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV**

UZBEKISTAN'S TRANSFORMATION UNDER HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV

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Uzbekistan has undoubtedly entered a phase of profound change with His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev coming into power in 2016. Since then, Uzbekistan has been transforming proactively to contribute to regional and global peace. The dynamic personality of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his grand initiatives, i.e., revitalizing Central and South Asia regional connectivity, have made him the most popular leader globally. Under this visionary statesman, significant reforms have been made, making the country resilient with multi-vector foreign policy contours. As a strong ally of Uzbekistan, Pakistan fully endorses and appreciates the idea of Uzbek President, His Excellency, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to connect Central Asia with South Asia with broader regional integration. New Uzbekistan is on the verge of the Third Renaissance.

"Renaissance" is a French word that means to be reborn, to be born again. The Uzbek concept "Uigonish Davri" (Evolutionary period or Renaissance") is a synonym for this term. Therefore, the new Uzbekistan reforms are worth mentioning and praising. The new dynamism within Uzbek society, as well as a fresh approach to foreign relations, where a new spirit of regionalism is taking root is highly commendable. Under the New Uzbekistan reforms, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has liberalized the foreign currency market to attract investments. There have been considerable improvements in the media landscape. The reform process is fully underway, seeking to modernize and liberalize the economy and society. Moreover, to strengthen openness and transparency, the visionary leadership of Uzbekistan is ambitious to implement the constitutional rules on freedom of speech, spreading information, and regional integration.

The third renaissance's reforms amid political openness, bank sector reforms, agriculture reforms, financial market reforms, privatization, education reforms, energy sector reforms, and tax reforms. The structural changes within the country would bring positive outcomes outside the country. The economic and trade openness would integrate many regional nations with Uzbekistan.

New Approach in Ensuring Religious Tolerance, Interfaith Harmony and Peace:

Regional cooperation, religious tolerance, and interfaith harmony have been the essence of diplomacy. Countries all around the world are trying to build connectivity and understand each other's cultures. Liberal and open policy regimes enable countries to cooperate in a number of areas. In this aspect, Uzbekistan has emerged as an important player in the realm of politics. Due to the policies of the visionary leader, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the world is witnessing a change. The regional dynamics have been evolving, and that calls for unity, harmony, and regional cooperation. In this regard, the idea of reviving Central-South Asian regional connectivity is vital and holds immense importance. Uzbekistan's open

and dynamic foreign policy under His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has proved to be a milestone development for regional integration. It is important to understand the historical roots and context of religious tolerance in Central Asia. The Central Asian region, in particular Uzbekistan, has long been a region of diverse people with diverse customs, cultures, languages, lifestyles, and religions. Uzbekistan's geographical location at the crossroads of important trade routes, economic and cultural ties with many countries has had a significant impact on the religious and cultural life of the local people. One of the important factors of lasting stability is that all nationalities and religions comply with the principles of solidarity, tolerance and mutual respect in today's spiritual and religious processes. It is now important to eradicate the forms of immorality and intolerance among people, to promote morality, humanism, tolerance and peace, mutual respect, and sincere friendship in society. In this aspect, inter-religious tolerance is the



pertinent principle of democracy, a prerequisite for the freedom of society and individuals, and a manifestation of universal value. In Uzbekistan, the idea of interfaith tolerance is recognized as an important pillar of spiritual development. Tolerance is a principle of peaceful coexistence. Conflict, rather than confrontation, is the priority of consensus philosophy as an important feature of tolerance. The main aspect of state and religious relations is the non-interference of religion in politics. After all, any religion has spiritual and moral implications. When it comes to the relationship between religion and the secular state, it is important to state that the principle of separation of religion from the state lies at its heart. The dynamic leadership of Uzbekistan is openly tackling challenges, including religious freedoms. Uzbekistan is aspiring towards its centuries-long traditions of tolerance and inter-religious harmony. The country's ethnic diversity and religious harmony is a legacy of the old Silk Road, which served as the main driver of civilizations and cultures. For centuries, the territory of today's Uzbekistan has been a home for well-known scholars and spiritual leaders like the 9th century Imam Bukhari and Imam Maturidi, and the 14th century Baha Uddin al-Naqshbandi.

They were critical to defining the humanistic essence of Islam, which calls for kindness, peace, and tolerance. In Uzbekistan, the moderate and enlightened practices and teachings of Islam and many other religions are able to flourish. The incumbent government has introduced new regulations that simplify the procedure for state registration of religious organizations, reducing the fees for registration fivefold, easing the reporting procedure, and adopting the practice of suspending a religious organization's activity only on its discretion or by a court decision. One of the great achievements in this regard was the high-level delegation from Uzbekistan, which attended the July 2018 Ministerial on advancing religious freedom, the first-ever conducted by the U.S. Department of State. At the meeting, Uzbekistan was singled out by U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo as an example of a country marching toward greater openness and a freer society. Since then, Uzbekistan has been striving for interfaith harmony and organizing



such activities. Furthermore, the development of each country and its reputation in the world community depend on atmosphere of peace and tolerance. Today, Uzbekistan is entering a new stage of development, where representatives of different nationalities, ethnic groups, religions, and confessions live together in a family of friendship, solidarity, and mutual respect. At the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, large-scale reforms are being implemented in the country, reflecting the political and economic modernization, i.e., the transformation of Uzbekistan into a modern state. Becoming a modern state implies securing human rights. In fact, no society can achieve sustainable development without providing religious freedom. That is why religious tolerance has been identified as one of the priority directions of state policy in Uzbekistan. I believe that this positive development would spread region-wide and integrate regional countries. Moreover, it will contribute to eliminate prejudices and negative stereotypes and will allow Uzbekistan to be seen as offering a unique model of ensuring peace and prosperity in a multi-ethnic society. All such significant developments were possible because of far-sightedness and prudent policy measures taken by His Excellency President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. imran



THE THIRD RENAISSANCE OF UZBEKISTAN: LEADERSHIP ROLE OF SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV

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Assuming responsibilities of a nascent state is an uphill journey, one that requires fortitude of purpose and commitment to the cause. In this aspect, leaders define and construct a trajectory not only for their government but also their entire state. To capitalize and bolster economic progress with a combination of threats and opportunities requires skilled leadership and the understanding of how emergent and crucial such decisions may be in foreseeable future. It is nothing short of a renaissance and cannot be achieved without dynamic leadership and a sense of purpose amalgamated within a visionary spirit. The Post-colonial order and newly formed states have had rough seas ahead to compete within the global race for economic sufficiency. Their prospects to achieve economic liberalism have remained sketchy due to the widening gap exacerbated by a

fast-tracked world of changing aspirations and expectations. In this realpolitik, Central Asian leadership has embarked on a miraculous journey towards a new economic dimension. Leaders in Central Asia have reintroduced their potential and capacity to being part of global economic ascension and postured themselves to a new era of regional integration and economic cooperation. Uzbekistan has a rich history despite being landlocked. Uzbekistan remained under a constant hazard of being unable to achieve socioeconomic and socio-political freedom. Despite being one of the fundamental links to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Uzbekistan has had to strive for regional cooperation to reap the benefits of such enterprises. Such threats were exceptionally understood by His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan, who has dedicated his political sagacity and administrative acumen to accomplish his dream of



economic sufficiency and regional integration. His dynamic leadership ranges from specifically addressing domestic challenges to spearheading international connectivity, which is a hallmark of his presidency. Under His Excellency's commitment to development and collective economic growth initiatives, not only Uzbekistan but South Asia as a whole stand to reap benefits of regional connectivity. His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev has taken an unconventional stance on prevalent threat perceptions which has remained an unprecedented approach to cordially address vital national and regional security challenges. His Excellency represents the new generation of political discourse in Uzbekistan. He has been credited as the architect of uplifting national agricultural sector and economic reform. His Excellency was crucial in averting a possible war with Tajikistan over the Rogun Dam, where he proposed cooperation instead of conflict. His

Excellency is also credited with providing more freedom to the press, initiated a series of pardons for political prisoners and continues to work effortlessly on economic and regional connectivity. Under his leadership, Uzbekistan has sought to repair the relationship with its neighbours and has dedicated significant attention to the peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has displayed finesse and proficiency in prioritizing joint ventures and economic reintegration from re-establishing ties with South Asia for regional socioeconomic connectivity to supporting rehabilitation in Afghanistan. He prioritized infrastructural development and focused on exclusively engaging with South Asia to create a mutual framework on common vulnerabilities. Tashkent has not only provided a common cause under his leadership but through summits and conferences has signalled its dedication and commitment to serving as a bridge



between Central Asia and South Asia. Being close proximity neighbours to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan are frontline states for rehabilitation and recovery of the region. Pakistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan share a relationship that ranges from tourism to cultural diplomacy and from global economic junctures to operating as junction states for Asia's regional connectivity. His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has indicated his strong determination in connecting South Asia and Central Asia, and this milestone achievement would require analogous leaders to support the same. Pakistan, under Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan, has displayed a similar level of dedication to interregional connectivity and dedication to economic liberalization. Pakistan is a key player in the Belt and Road Initiative and also a vital actor in rationalizing a framework for regional connectivity and mutual economic development. His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev has always advocated economic reform and infrastructural connectivity and has always championed to aspire to a more connected regional coexistence. His policy of amicably approaching bilateral and multilateral vulnerabilities has averted longstanding threats of protracted conflict. His Excellency

Shavkat Mirziyoyev has initiated a renaissance for Uzbekistan; that is designed on shared development. His vision is based on domestic progress. By adopting a proactive and development-centric approach. In the long term, the project has culminated into a new geo-economic landscape for Central Asia generally. His priority is amid growth of people and infrastructural upgradation is his commitment to approach South Asia for similar commitments". This resurgence of economic and cultural connectivity is a hallmark for Central Asia's commitment to introducing itself as an avenue of economic progress regional and global proportions".

"President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was the states to put forward a great goal, a noble task: *Ou*people should live well not in the future, but today and he found its solution. The idea of the third Renaissance is especially attractive. The fact is that in the current time based on science, when the world can be controlled only from its heights, *sba* ideas can give a powerful charge. In the age of globalization, the most importantly, feelings never atrophy, views on the Motherland and its future are implement his dream, a new development formula has been derived, based on five pillars

— integration, innovation, human capital, and economic growth. The leader wants to see the country's future in education, science and enlightenment. The idea of the third Renaissance was raised to the level of a national idea, connected with the dream of being equal in the modern world with the most progressive countries, thereby more "vividly showing the feeling of love for the Motherland and the people. Under His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan stands to posit itself as a bastion of peace, prosperity, cultural connectivity and a platform for the confluence of regional integration. His vision has positively impacted domestic growth and sociopolitical reconstruction and his vision for Central-South Asia connectivity is one of the most landmark events in the Central Asian Road to economic liberalization.



EXPANSION OF SCIENTIFIC, CULTURAL, AND HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGES: A GREAT PROPOSAL BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV

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Regional cooperation and connectivity have been the essence of diplomacy. Countries all around the world are trying to enhance integration and understand each other's cultures. In this regard, liberal and open policy regimes enable countries to cooperate in many domains. The grand initiative of Central and South Asian connectivity by His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has proved to be a milestone development for regional integration. In the 21st century, the rise of Uzbekistan's potential role both within and outside the Central Asian block has been witnessed due to the remarkable efforts of incumbent Uzbek President Shavkat Miriyoyev. Uzbekistan has become a significant regional player to connect Central Asia with South Asia via successful inclusive economic development projects. Moreover, the third Renaissance declared by the president of Uzbekistan is likely

to bring fruitful outcomes for the country and integrate other regional countries. Constructive reforms have been announced under the third Renaissance. History has marked the efforts of H.E. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to provide a platform to all regional countries to strengthen partnerships, resolve differences, revive cultural linkages, and establish an integrated framework of future cooperation.

Rejuvenating Cultural and Humanitarian Ties:

Central and South Asia have interacted with each other since ancient times. New knowledge, scientific achievements, and cultural and spiritual values were spread along the Great Silk and Indo-Gangetic Roads. The peoples of both regions were within the framework of common state formations - the Bactrian and Kushan kingdoms, the Türkic kaganate, the Ghaznavid states, the Timurids, and the Baburids. Unfortunately, in the 19th century, the interconnectedness between Central and South Asia was broken. Various obstacles arose, and the era of cooperation was replaced by a period of confrontation and mistrust. In contemporary times, the world has entered into an era of global geopolitical transformations, which bring both challenges and new opportunities. In these conditions, the revival of mutual ties between Central and South Asia and cultural diplomacy have become more demanding and objective. Cultural diplomacy polishes foreign policy and is crucial in international relations. Art and culture are at the forefront of many countries' promotional efforts. In this aspect, Central and South Asian countries have great ancient civilizations amid art, famous cuisine, innovation,

spiritual land, and exceptional cultural norms. The wonderful architecture of Tashkent, Samarkand, Khiva, and Bukhara reflect the ancient and varied nature of Central Asian historical heritage. These countries recognize that showing their cultural heritage allow them to show who they are, creating a positive image, thus helping to increase regional connectivity. Now, countries use soft power diplomatic tools to enhance their global outreach and project a positive image of a country. The project of inclusive economic development, corridors, transportation routes will increase Central and South Asian connectivity. It also maintains people-to-people connections, tourism, science & technology, and exploring new avenues of cooperation between Central and South Asian countries.

Prospects under Regional Integration:

The grand idea of Central-South Asian connectivity by H.E. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev would unleash cultural benefits. While discussing the concept of cultural diplomacy, it is important to refer to M. McClellan's pyramid, who also tried to place it within the context of traditional diplomacy. The top of the pyramid can be understood by the forum of international organizations, strategic

alliances or trade agreements. Therefore, it follows that the next level is the involvement that requires a two-stage flow of information. This means the support of a given country by opinion-makers who can later influence the opinions of others. Looking at this pattern, the next level of developing knowledge by the country projecting its image and research, exchange programs, building academic linkages, and cultural centers. The next level is curiosity and the attendant search for information about the country, such as knowing the language, traditions, norms, etc. The pyramid's foundation is consciousness/awareness about the country, i.e., media awareness, international status, role in regional or international platforms, global outreach, programs. The pyramid reflects the general structural hierarchy of building relationships or developing cultural connections with countries.

Role of Uzbekistan and Pakistan in Connecting Central and South Asia:
Regional integration helps countries to overcome gaps, divisions, and challenges. In this aspect, academic/intellectual institutional development, tourism, cultural exchanges, people-to-people contacts, domestic and foreign policy, exporting

brands, and providing investment opportunities are significant in recent times. A common framework for education policy and practice will help to foster collaboration and progress towards regional convergence and shared property for Central and South Asia. These factors are also intrinsic to counter common perils. In this aspect, academic/intellectual facilitation is needed among countries to promote peace, dialogue, and accept cultural and civilizational diversities. Collaboration in the academic and educational sectors would do wonders to foster the process of regional integration. In this aspect, Central Asian countries and Pakistan can devise a holistic policy mechanism to provide opportunities for joint ventures, humanitarian exchanges, and boosting collaboration in science & technology. For the expansion of science, cultural and humanitarian exchanges, Uzbekistan proposed to hold an international forum on the historical heritage of Central and South Asia under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Termez. Pakistan, as a great partner of Uzbekistan, firmly supports this proposal for greater regional connectivity. Under this initiative, I believe that students, scholars, intellectuals, diplomats, and people of

both regions will get the opportunity to get international exposure and understand diverse cultures and norms. This proposal would open new doors for joint ventures, integrate nations at one platform, revive historic cultural ties, curtail differences, bring peace, and harness trade/commercial potentials between both regions.



STRENGTHENING TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA: INITIATIVES BY UZBEKISTAN

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The Central Asian and South Asian regions share rich tradition of historical connections and geo-cultural harmony. Uzbekistan has taken up initiative to explore prospects of connectivity between the two regions. It is indeed gratifying to witness a forward-looking reformist strategy enunciated by the visionary leadership of President H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The inter-regional connectivity envisioned by the leadership is not limited to one but rather multiple avenues. It includes, transport, logistics, energy, trade, industry, investment, technological, cultural and humanitarian domains. Presently, a new government in Kabul is in the process of settling down, Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan trade corridor could become a cornerstone to connectivity between the regions of Central and South Asia.

A full realization of this envisioned project, holds immense economic advantage and socio-economic benefits for the two regions. Interestingly, it comes at a time when Pakistan has formally announced a shift in its geo-politics centred foreign policy towards geo-economics. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the premier project of China's mega enterprise the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), is also progressing well in Pakistan. China, meanwhile is looking for new partnerships to join CPEC. The new government in Kabul has shown willingness to become part of CPEC enterprise.

On its part, Beijing has reassured the Taliban government of other investments in Afghanistan. In this backdrop, the new connectivity paradigm of Uzbekistan now requires political resolve, drive, and determination on part of major stakeholders in the two regions. During Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Uzbekistan in July this year, the two sides signed number of MoUs. These included Protocol on the Exchange of Pre-arrival Information on Goods moved across the State Border, Uzbekistan and Pakistan on Transit Trade (AUPTT), Protocol on Cooperation in the Field of Military Education, Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen and Tourist Groups, MoU between Foreign Service Academy of Pakistan and University of World Economy and Diplomacy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Cultural Exchange Programme 2021-2026, and MoU on Matters relating to Tourism.

Regardless of an absence of diplomatic recognition of the Taliban government in Kabul, drawing advantage of the opportunity at hand and in line with ongoing developments in both regions would be in order. Following are few suggested first steps in conceptualizing the wide-ranging partnerships under various MoUs:

- a. A joint team of seasoned entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, educationists, members from chambers and commerce and industry and scholars from Uzbekistan should first visit Pakistan to hold parleys with counterparts and visit important centres. The team may visit institutes like Civil Services Academy, National School of Public Policy, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore, industrial sites as at Faisalabad, Sialkot, etc. before holding parleys.
- b. This should be followed by a visit to Gwadar where an appropriate briefing should be given by Pakistan-China Centre, with suitable policy options for Uzbekistan.
- c. The basic parleys should aim to reach consensus on various MoUs and way forward to realize the same. Political or any other hindrances in way developing connectivity must also be identified. A similar visit could be next arranged by Tashkent for Pakistan side.
- d. Universities should be approached for brighter ideas by academia, students exchange program will strengthen the prospects of togetherness
- e. Initiatives such as Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTAA), CASA, BRI, Pipeline projects and other connectivity endeavors should be given top priority.
- f. Pakistan offers Karachi and Gwadar port to Central Asian states. The finalization of Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) would help boost trade.

- g. Once fair headway is achieved, representatives from China and if possible, a member of sitting government in Afghanistan could be invited to participate and share their thoughts.

Pakistan's robustness and recent upbeat in building relations with Central Asian states is a pleasant development. This needs to be put forward and a step further from the signing of various MoUs. Pakistan has shown a diversity in its attitude towards dealing with regional countries by facilitating a helping hand. Afghanistan is one such example. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan, probable changing role of Afghanistan, breakout of pandemic, China's investments and developments in these regions are all indicators that this is the right time to materialize the dream of connected South Asia and Central Asia anticipated by President H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev. In the July conference hosted by Uzbekistan, China announced that it supports the building of a corridor connecting Central and South Asia. It will help countries in the region transform from 'landlocked' to 'land connected' nations. In the future, it will assist building a key international transport route connecting Europe with Asia, thus linking the 'North' with the 'South'. This has special importance for countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and is vital in the future for Afghanistan. All are land-locked countries yet can use Afghanistan's location close to Central Asia to access seaports in Iran and Pakistan. This vision will unleash its true spirit once it is fully materialized.



SIGNIFICANCE OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION FOR RESOLVING COMMON DISPUTES: ROLE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Uzbekistan, sitting at the crossroads of East and West, remains the most populous republic in Central Asia. Moreover, it is geographically a central state in Central Asia as well. Uzbekistan has appeared as a significant player in regional development. Additionally, being a neighbor of Afghanistan and possessing a wide range of natural resources like; cotton, uranium, gold, and natural gas further enhances its geographic importance. The aim of expanding regional connectivity between South Asia and Central is long-standing as the landlocked Central Asian States would get access to trade routes and markets towards South whereas South Asia would obtain way into the resources and opportunities towards the North. Uzbekistan, for centuries, remained an important country and trade hub between the Central Asia Republics (CARs) and South Asian region throughout the time of the ancient Silk Route.

Currently, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan due to his exceptional commercial diplomacy and inventive leadership has achieved greater regional connectivity. Furthermore, Civilizational linkages in the region under President Mirziyoyev's visionary headship have now been influenced by viable diplomacy and historical links resulting in growing trade & commerce. Central Asia remained the main focus of Uzbekistan's new foreign policy through enhanced political understanding and greater economic cooperation. That is why; President Shavkat Mirziyoyev took decisive and concrete steps to develop mutually beneficial relations with neighbouring states and establish trustful contacts with all other Central Asian leaders. His Excellency, Shavkat

Mirziyoyev, immediately after being elected in 2016, took proactive steps by initiating many programs, aiming to resolve main regional problems. Uzbekistan started demarcating its borders with its neighbouring states. Though, border issues remained the bone of contention for many years in Central Asia and kept halting cooperation initiatives between them. Outstandingly, in almost two years of the Presidency of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, he resolved the border accords with all Uzbekistan's neighbouring states. At the same time, some of these accords were not 100% resolved. However, they had a positive impact on the relations between these states. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was also capable of solving one of the region's prime issues- the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. After several years of passionate and dedicated work, Presidents of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed a protocol on the 25th of April 2021 that was the final delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. Moreover, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have launched high-speed rail links and bus routes. Uzbekistan new railway communications have been initiated with Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, traffic and commutation have been opened beside the Tashkent – Andijan –

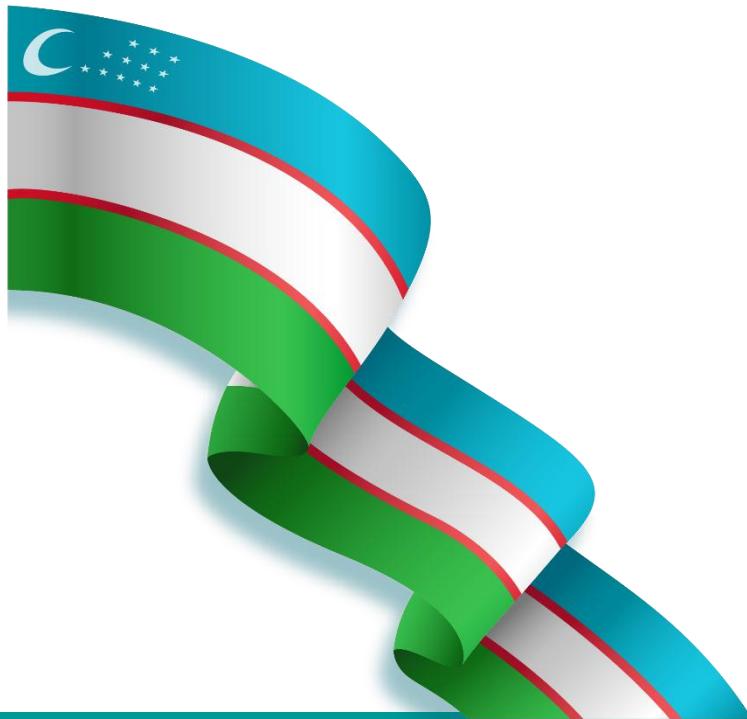
Osh – Irkeshtam – Kashgar road corridor, hence, allowing for the first time, road carriers directly from China to Central Asia. Uzbekistan in Afghanistan has built the Hairaton-Mazar-i-Sharif railway. This railway link is operating successfully in Afghanistan. Consequently, an agreement was successfully reached to extend this railway line to Heart in Afghanistan. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev will ensure access to the Indian and Iranian railways passing through Chahbahar port within the outline of the North-South project, which is further an achievement towards attaining the aim of regional integration. In February 2021, Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan (PAKAFUZ) agreed on establishing a railway project. PAKAFUZ will enable Uzbekistan's vision of getting access to the rest of the global economy possible through Pakistani ports. It is going to open up Central Asia and beyond to Pakistan as well. On 15-16 July 2021, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev successfully hosted a conference in Tashkent in which leaders from countries of South and Central Asia along with main international and regional countries and organizations were invited. Through this conference, Uzbek President aimed to benefit from historically close links among both the

regions for emerging mutually beneficial strategic projects in economy, trade, communication, transport, humanitarian cooperation and culture. Uzbek President, Mirziyoyev rightly said and has proved from his enlightened foreign and regional policies that: ‘Without tighter relationships and economic connectivity, we cannot turn this part of the world, and the Eurasian continent, into a stable and prosperous space’. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, took some bold initiatives to deepen regional cooperation in various fields like; connectivity, water and energy use, economic and investment cooperation, development of trade and promoting tourism. Efforts of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in contributing to the international and regional transport corridors are worth mentioning. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan jointly built the Turkmenabad-Farab Road and Railway Bridge, resulting in creating the shortest access to the markets of the Middle East between the Central Asian states. Moreover, Uzbekistan’s dedication resulted in the construction of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railway route, which would open the way towards the Persian Gulf and Turkey through the Caucasus. Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China linked through the first train in June 2020, resulting in

further integrating the region. This route could reduce distance up to 900 kilometres, equal to seven or eight days from China to Southeast Europe. Furthermore, Uzbekistan’s cooperation under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in the SCO has been growing. In his speeches, at SCO meetings, he has put forward several programs aiming to consolidate efforts in the transport sector of the SCO participants. As enhancing and improve the existing and creating new transport and logistics, infrastructures are essential for the mutual interests of all the SCO member states. The geo-economic attractiveness of Central Asia is enhanced as an important transit and communication hub between East and West after the implementation of such projects. Consultative Meetings of the Heads of States of Central Asia, in 2018, initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, brought all Central Asian leaders together for establishing the Central Asian community of interests. He kept contributing to the development of the new political environment in Central Asia, which would provide the basis for a resilient, reinforced and united Central Asian region. Moreover, regional transformation became more tangible and achievable after the first time in the history of the region when all Central

Asian states signed a five-sided document on friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation in the 21st century. Uzbekistan's dynamic regional policy for rapprochement with all Central Asian states and strengthening political dialogue at the highest level has produced considerable practical results, principally by giving new thrust for collaboration in the economic, transport, trade and communication spheres. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev is undoubtedly aware of the increasing Central Asian region's competitiveness and economic potential. He well-knows that the global economy is impossible without comprehending efficient regional cooperation projects. Therefore, solid steps have already been taken by Uzbekistan's President in this direction.





Part II

UZBEKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY CONTOURS

UZBEKISTAN'S ROLE IN REGIONAL FORUMS AND NEW POLICY INITIATIVES

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Since independence, Uzbekistan has framed its foreign policy to maximize national security through a strong, dynamic and diversified economy. Uzbekistan surprised the analysts and students of Central Asian studies by its miraculous economic performance during the transition with the special 'Uzbek Model' of gradual reforms, prioritizing the economy over politics and a prudent guiding role of the state in economic reforms. Since then, Uzbekistan has never looked back and today high-speed bullet trains are operational intra-city, the economy is growing at high-rate despite pandemic, and per capita income is much higher than many developing countries, including Pakistan. During my visit to Tashkent in July 2021, I observed that the city had been entirely newly built as I could witness the developments taken place since mid-1990s when

I was studying in Tashkent. It speaks volumes of transforming growth into infrastructure development. Uzbekistan has been emerging as an important regional player focusing on foreign economic cooperation inter and intra regionally. The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, immediately after his election, indicated a prudent, pragmatic and dynamic foreign policy vision. He stated in his first address to the Parliament (Oliy Majlis) in May 2017 that Uzbekistan needs a 'modern foreign policy'. Having been prime minister under president Islam Karimov since 2003, Shavkat Mirziyoyev had first-hand knowledge of the country's foreign policy and the need for further reforms necessitated by Uzbekistan's growth and development. Uzbekistan, under Shavkat Mirziyoyev, thus swiftly moved towards active participation in regional and global forums and agreements

with a focus on trade and economic cooperation. The President of Uzbekistan has rightly assessed the key geographical position of his country in the Central Asian region. Therefore, he gave special focus to this region as a foreign policy priority. The President announced a fundamentally new aspect in his foreign policy focusing on regional cooperation and development. In particular, the development of cooperation with Central Asia, wider Eurasian space and South Asia through the promotion of peace in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has been maintaining balance in its relations with major powers, i.e., Russia, China and the USA, to benefit from their investment, trade and transfer of technology. Uzbekistan similarly follows a policy of military neutrality and non-interference in the affairs of foreign countries, non-membership in military alliances, non-deployment of forces to other countries, non-acceptance of military basis on its soil good neighborliness in the new initiatives. Uzbekistan's new foreign policy initiatives and engagements in the region have found widespread support from other regional states. The main objectives of the new initiatives have been to augment foreign economic cooperation, amicably resolve conflicts within Central Asia, facilitating smooth

border crossing for trade and commerce, and thus achieving Central Asian solidarity and prosperity. The 'Consultative Forum' of the Central Asian Leaders revived with the efforts of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to resolve the conflicts and issues through negotiations and finding political compromises with consensus. This Consultative Forum has become a regular annual practice. Owing to the efforts of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Central Asian Republics have successfully addressed issues related to water and border crossings in mutual understanding through consultations. The visionary leader of Uzbekistan foresees two main goals to be achieved from regional cooperation within Central Asia. First, the Central Asian region will be viewed as a single large market by foreign investors with smooth border crossings. Secondly, Central Asia as a whole will maximally benefit from integration plans of major powers. Through regional cooperation, natural resources of the region will be translated into inclusive growth and development. The new initiatives of the Republic of Uzbekistan also aim to address the region-wide security issues in a jointly coordinated manner to pave the way for sustainable peace and development. Thus, dialogue is the key to resolving

regional issues and Tashkent adopted this feature under the new regime. If current policies and initiatives by president Mirziyoyev continue for a substantial time in the future, regional integration in Central Asia will become a reality and pave the way for economic development of this region and neighbouring regions. Uzbekistan is an important member of SCO and playing an active and constructive role in the organization. Former Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan and incumbent Secretary-General of SCO Vladimir Norov notes that the speedy settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan is a key factor in establishing stability in the SCO space. The establishment of an early peace in Afghanistan is an ideal recipe for strengthening the interconnectedness amongst the countries of Central and South Asia. In this context, Uzbekistan's initiatives to build the trans-Afghan railway line and subsequently developing transport corridors are quite consistent and reasonable. The plans to strengthen connectivity between Central and South Asia logically follow Tashkent's regional policy, through which it manifests itself as a driving force for regional transformation. Uzbekistan has been structuring and supporting multilateral regional and international forums that promote security and

connectivity inter and intra regionally. The Republic is participating and organizing important regional forums to enhance connectivity and regional integration. In this context, the Republic of Uzbekistan organized an important International Conference on Central and South Asian Connectivity. Participants of the Tashkent Conference expressed the hope that this time, not strategic competition, but the wish to achieve shared benefits and prosperity through connectivity will drive transformational changes in the region. Central and South Asia have a significant regional integration potential thanks to their rich resource endowment, economic complementarities, common challenges and geographical adjacency. The benefits of the gravitational pull of geographical proximity on the movement of capital, goods, services and people in Central and South Asia have remained underutilized due to instability in Afghanistan. Trade and economic connectivity between Central and South Asia are instrumental in resolving the socio-economic problems of Afghanistan and the entire region. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in his opening statement, confirmed that strengthening ties with its neighbours is a priority for Uzbekistan "a reliable, stable, and predictable partner, interested in and committed to

constructive cooperation based on mutual interest". The President reminded participants that the close historical ties between the two regions, going back to several millennia, teach present generations that "Without tighter relationship and economic connectivity, we cannot turn this part of the world, and the Eurasian continent, into a stable and prosperous space." The conference signalled the beginning of a new area when the countries of the region revive the millennia-old tradition of cultivating thriving trade relations, scientific and cultural exchanges that made them so prosperous and allowed them to build some of the greatest civilizations in human history before the onset of the Great Game. Thereby, the new initiatives of Uzbekistan will bring shared dividends with interdependence and stakes in each other's stability inter and intra regionally. Uzbekistan's role in participating and organizing various forums for advocating and promoting regional cooperation is becoming the voice of Central Asian states in all neighbouring countries. Uzbekistan actively participating in regional forums, including the forum for development of International Transport Corridor (ITC) and focusing on the development of mega projects of railway, highways, airports and free economic zones

constructions. In this regard, an international conference, "Central Asia in the system of international transport corridors: strategic prospects and unrealized opportunities" was held in Tashkent in 2018. Uzbekistan is playing an active role in the ECO and CAREC initiatives for enhanced connectivity and cooperation on environment and sustainable development. Policymakers from Uzbekistan participated in the World Bank-sponsored forum for Central Asian Region on Safer and Resilient Learning Environment in Bishkek in 2019. Tashkent also hosted the 15th Procurement, Integrity, Management and Openness (PRIMO) Forum in 2019 co-sponsored by World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Asian Development Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Uzbekistan is also playing an important role in Turkic Cooperation Council. His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev, while addressing the Council of Turkic speaking states on 31st March, 2021 emphasized increased trade, investment, economic cooperation and connectivity between the Council members and the regional states so that experiences are shared, the natural resources are utilized maximally and geographies are explored and capitalized upon for the benefit of the common people and inclusive

regional development. Uzbekistan has always made efforts to provide platforms and play a constructive role in achieving peace in Afghanistan. It was due to the efforts of Uzbekistan that the 6+2 (six neighbors of Afghanistan plus Russia and the U.S.) format was developed for having peace in Afghanistan during the 1990s. On July 19-20, 1999, the Tashkent high-level meeting of the 6+2 group on Afghanistan was held under the auspices of the UN. The Taliban also participated in that conference in 1999. Keeping the tradition of mediation and facilitation alive, Uzbekistan actively joined the international efforts to bring peace and normalcy to Afghanistan. Ambassador Ismatulla Irgashev, the special representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan visited Doha in 2018. Tashkent hosted Taliban delegation in August 2018 for peace talks. The Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Excellency Abdulaziz Kamilov, also visited Doha during March 2019 to facilitate the peace process in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has an important role to play in the peace and development of Afghanistan as it can be the gateway for exports and imports via the Termiz Cargo Centre (rail and road) and Navoi International Airport for

Afghanistan. Afghanistan benefitted from Uzbekistan's expertise in railroad modernization with the construction of a link from Hairatan, on the Uzbek-Afghan border, to Mazar-e-Sharif, a major city in northern Afghanistan which was jointly funded by Uzbekistan and CAREC. Uzbekistan is also a gateway to training and education for young Afghans through the Educational Center for Training Afghan Citizens in Termiz, a cooperative effort of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, the European Union, and the United Nations Development Program. President Mirziyoyev has declared that the security of Afghanistan is the security of Uzbekistan, a guarantee of the stability and development of the entire Central and Southern Asian region. Uzbekistan and the rest of Central Asia are ready to help Afghanistan seize the opportunity to join the world's economy and keep it from becoming an ungoverned space. In post-US Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is in close coordination with the neighbours of Afghanistan to avoid any humanitarian crises in this war-torn neighbour and make ground for a sustainable peace for enhanced regional connectivity.

UZBEKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

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Uzbekistan has a key position in the Central Asian region. It is the most populous country of Central Asia, and the largest double land-locked state in the world. This part of Turkestan (old name of Central Asia) had remained at the helm of regional trade and politics. Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva are a few of the oldest cities in the region. These cities are famous the world over for their old heritage and culture. These cities had been at the crossroads of famous Silk Routes. Ferghana Valley is the most densely populated region of the whole Central Asia. Almost all the ethnic groups live there. The Soviets divided it into three countries. Nevertheless, the majority area is within Uzbek territory. Ethnic Uzbeks have always been active in regional politics and the economy. Since independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has pursued an active and region-oriented foreign policy. Despite a short interval of semi-isolationism under the first President Islam Karimov, overall foreign

policy contours of Uzbekistan had been inclusive with a major focus on multilateral regional efforts. This is evident from the fact that Tashkent joined almost all those organizations striving for regional cooperation. Tashkent was quick to join ECO, CIS, CSTO, CACO, EEC etc. Despite being the double landlocked country, Uzbekistan tried to transform this challenge into an opportunity by fostering good relations with the neighboring states and other regional countries. Having a unique geography that connects to all Central Asian states and Afghanistan, Tashkent tried to resolve all of its issues with the neighboring states, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It has a dispute over borders and water distribution done under Soviet rule. However, besides having

very small-scale scuffles, there had not been any major military expedition due to these issues. Despite the fact that Tashkent has the largest military in the region, it never tried to resolve such issues through force. Uzbekistan has always been positive in all efforts for the resolution of Afghan crises. Islam Karimov's initiatives like "6+1" and "6+2" are good examples in this regard. However, with the rise to power in 2016, the new president, H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has brought a paradigm shift in Uzbekistan's foreign policy, which is now "characterized by dynamism, openness, initiative and pragmatism.". He is the man in motion and taken out of the country of semi-isolationism under the Karimov regime. He has successfully resolve most of the bilateral issues, including water and border disputes with neighbouring countries. The bilateral trade with regional countries has reached new heights under his regime. After being elected as president of Uzbekistan, president Mirziyoyev stated in the Majlis that 'Uzbekistan needs a new foreign policy'. It was a clear indicator that he is going to reform the Uzbek foreign policy onto modern lines. While talking about the Central Asian region, he stated that "Central Asian is a region with which the vital interests of our country are connected." Uzbekistan

under president Mirziyoyev has focused on cooperation in the energy sector along with special attention to the improvement in physical infrastructure, particularly transportation network. An increase in economic activities and infrastructure development projects under BRI is one of the manifestations of this policy. Tashkent is negotiating with CSTO and Eurasian Economic Union as well. These are the indicators that Uzbekistan wants to play its constructive role in the security and economic uplift of the region. Tashkent has opened up new border crossings with all its neighbouring countries. The only railway line in Afghanistan, which connects Mizar-i-Shareef with Termez (Uzbekistan) has been constructed by Uzbekistan. Since Uzbekistan wants to connect to broader South Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern and African markets through the Indian Ocean, president Mirziyoyev has given a go-ahead to construct the Trans-Afghan railway line. This railway line will connect Mizar-i-Shareef with Peshawar in Pakistan through Kabul. The railway line will connect with the ML-1 project of Pakistan railways. The ML-1 project will bring a revolution in railways transportation in Pakistan. It will not only uplift the standard of railways but the speed of trains as well. Thus,

reducing the transportation time. Once completed, both ML-1 and Trans-Afghan railway projects will strengthen South-Central Asia connectivity. The concept of South-Central Asia connectivity has recently been given by president Mirziyoyev. In fact, this concept is to complement the Chinese BRI project. Both projects aim to revive the ancient Silk Routes for broader Eurasian trade through the land. Once critical to the CASA-1000 project under the Karimov regime, Uzbekistan is an active supporter of this project now. Tashkent also supports the TAPI project. Every effort which supplements South-Central Asia connectivity is on the cards of Mirziyoyev's regime. Flexibility and fair treatment of the ethnic minorities under the new regime has also strengthened Tashkent's relations with its immediate neighbours. President Mirziyoyev has fostered cordial relations with all major world powers USA, China and Russia. Regional Center for the Development of Transportation and Communication Interconnectedness was another idea given by president Mirziyoyev during his address to the 75th session of UNGA. Such endeavours are key for the deep integration of Central Asia with global economic and fiscal markets. Keeping in view the importance of Afghanistan as a link between South-Central Asia

connectivity, Tashkent is instrumental for the stability of Afghanistan. Tashkent is keenly observing the current developments in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have come to power. Tashkent has given clear signals that it wants to work with the Taliban regime for Afghanistan's stability and development. Uzbekistan, along with other immediate neighbours of Afghanistan wants an end to the miseries of the Afghan people. Uzbekistan also strives to connect international markets through Iranian ports. However, Tashkent has joined all projects particularly under BRI, to connect Iran with regional markets. Uzbekistan believes in incremental integration of the regional markets. It has also shown interest to extend Termez-Mizar-i-Shareef railway line to Herat in western Afghanistan. Subsequently, it can be connected to the Iranian railways network. Uzbekistan, under president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has not only progressed politically and economically but has opened up the new doors of regional integration. His regime has rightly changed the domestic and foreign policy outlook of Uzbekistan. The most important focus of his foreign policy is the Central Asian region. An increase in intra-regional trade volume and people-to-people connectivity is the manifestation of this policy. South-

Central Asian connectivity is the concept once materialized, would be a game-changer for the people of the broader Eurasian region. It is also going to revive the old religious, trade and cultural connections of both regions. In short, Uzbekistan under Shavkat Mirziyoyev will be completely modernized and developed in short span of time.



AN ASSESSMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF UZBEKISTAN: AN OVERVIEW OF EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

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This article intends to provide a descriptive account of the implementation of sustainable development goals by Uzbekistan. Besides, it also highlights the effective strategies taken by Uzbekistan by integrating and localizing goals in the country. This paper can inspire other countries such as Pakistan to understand and collaborate with Uzbekistan to achieve the goals by 2030. Every country envisions achieving success by creating policies to balance economic, social and environmental issues. This vision is aligned with the global goals or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted by the United Nations in the year 2015. These goals were called upon as universal goals for all nations to act jointly towards poverty alleviation, protect the planet and enable all to live with peace and prosperity. Since then, all countries have been striving towards developing policies to pace up in achieving the SDGs.

Historical Account of the Steps Taken by the Government of Uzbekistan to Achieve SDGs

Responding to the SDGs and their importance, in 2015, Uzbekistan adopted the Global 2030 Agenda for Sustainability Development and showed its commitment to implement through integration and localization of SDGs in all policies. Since 2016, the United Nations Development Group (UNSDG) has been working to support the countries to implement the 2030 Agenda and accelerate in achieving SDGs. Therefore, for this purpose, it created a joint approach with the name of “Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support” (MAPS) that provides a framework for structured implementation of SDGs. In 2018, the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reviewed plans in Uzbekistan under MAPS and suggested to create an official statistical database for monitoring and reporting the developments in the implementation of SDGs. In the same year, in October, an Interagency Coordination Council was created under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister. Besides, this council approved a roadmap by identifying and identifying the national SDGs along with 125 targets. In February 2019, 206 SDG indicators were approved at the national level thus depicting the seriousness of the government to achieve the goals. Moreover, during the same time, a web portal was launched by the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan to update information on SDG indicators. Subsequently, in September of the same year, a roadmap was approved as the 'First Voluntary National Review' for Uzbekistan. In February 2020, a parliamentary commission was established to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the global agenda in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Later in May 2020, public consultations were held as a follow-up of the progress done to achieve SDGs and further the same consultations were extended with the parliament and not-for-profit organizations (NGOs).

Progress of Uzbekistan on the Implementation of the Global Agenda:



According to the Sustainability Development Report 2021, the Republic of Uzbekistan is ranked 77 out of 165 countries. Goal 1 deals with poverty reduction, the country has done phenomenal progress to reduce hunger from the country. Similarly, Goal 2 intends to reduce hunger, the country has improved in reducing the prevalence of undernourishment percentage of the population. Goal 3 relates to good health and well-being. Uzbekistan has been able to reduce the maternal mortality rate and new HIV infections. As far as Goal 4 relating to the provision of quality education is concerned, Uzbekistan has improved the percentage of net primary enrollment rate. Most interestingly, the Republic of Uzbekistan has allocated more seats for females in the parliament, thus fulfilling goal 5 of gender equality. Another remarkable improvement can

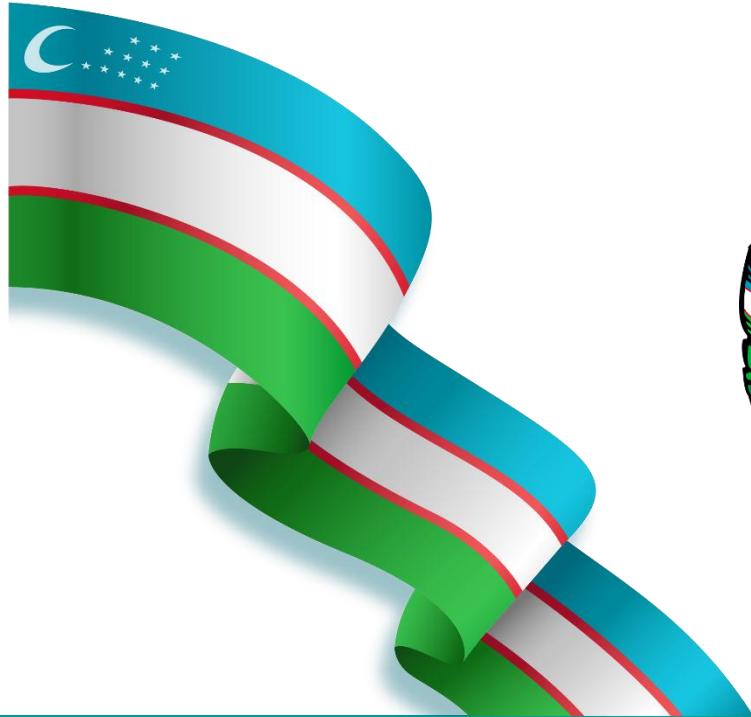
be observed in the greater percentage of the population having basic drinking water and sanitation services. This achievement reflects the achievement of Goal 6 that requires clean water and sanitation to its population. The availability of affordable and clean energy is considered a challenge for most lower-middle-income countries. However, Uzbekistan has been able to improve the accessibility of electricity, clean fuels and technology for cooking. Therefore, Uzbekistan is doing well in achieving Goal 7 that requires providing affordable and clean energy to the population. As far as Goal 9 is concerned, it deals in boosting the industry, innovation and infrastructure, there is a moderate upward trend in the percentage usage of internet usage by the population. Similarly, there is an increase in the subscriptions of mobile broadband by the users. Most importantly, there is a growth in the quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure of Uzbekistan. Moreover, there seems to be an enhancement of satisfaction with the public transportation prevalent in the country. Lastly, every country should possess a strong justice system led by strong institutions. Moreover, every country should strive to maintain peace both within and outside its geographical

boundaries. In this aspect, Uzbekistan has been able to reduce the percentage of homicides. Besides, a large percentage of population feel safe while walking alone at nights in the cities. This can help Uzbekistan to attract more tourists in the future.

Areas of Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Pakistan to Achieve the Global Agenda

Keeping in view the practical efforts by the Republic of Uzbekistan and its position at the 77th Rank in the Sustainability Development Index (SDI), there is an opportunity for other countries to seek assistance for achieving SDGs. For instance, Pakistan lags in most SDGs. According to the Sustainability Development Report 2021, Pakistan is ranked at the 129th level. In Pakistan, though a secretariat exists in the parliament for SDGs and further some operative cells exist in all the provinces of the country. However, the improvement in SDGs still lags behind. The reason can be attributed to the lack of data generation mechanisms. However, the biggest hurdle seems to lack of awareness at all levels especially among the common public. In this scenario, regional connectivity can play an important role by uplifting each other through mapping the goals and building

mutual capacity to achieve SDGs rapidly. Furthermore, there requires more efforts on improving the health and well-being of the population. The biggest challenge for Pakistan remains to provide clean water and sanitation to the population. Similarly, with the recent regional instability in Afghanistan after the Taliban took over the Capital city Kabul, a fall in rupee and a wide current account deficit have further pushed back any expectations that Pakistan may provide a peaceful, prosperous and equitable society to its population. During this turmoil, there is a need to develop strong connectives with the regional countries to seek help or at least learn from their achievements and develop policies that could accelerate the efforts to achieve the Global Agenda 2030. One of the countries with whom Pakistan can extend working relations by identifying common goals and one way to identify those goals can be through the Global Agenda 2030. Moreover, Pakistan can learn from the reforms taken by the Republic of Uzbekistan at the government and bureaucratic level by transforming the SDGs into National Goals that led the country to improve its ranking in the SDI for the year 2021. Additionally, Pakistan should also develop linkages with all stakeholders at the public front by including NGOs, higher learning academic institutions and civil society to develop a national policy to join hands to achieve the Global Agenda of 2030.



Part III

CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY: GREAT INITIATIVE BY HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV

REJUVENATING REGIONALISM INTO ACADEMIC COOPERATION: CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIAN CONNECTIVITY

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The 21st century has many key characteristics as it is the most revolutionary age in history. The pace and scope of the transformation have never been this great. Countries are inclined towards cooperation and wider regional alignments through economic linkages in the multipolar worlds, pursuing their collective goals. Therefore, it is important to consider the complex balance sheet involving risks and opportunities to access different aspects of International Relations between Central Asian and South Asian countries. To understand the existing potential of the broader region, examining geopolitical and geoeconomics pillars is highly significant. While analyzing the historical perspective, it is evident that this era has brought many transitions. In present times, countries have deepened cooperation among other states and regions.

In this context, the revival of cultural and humanitarian ties can pave the way to strengthen friendship and mutual understandings between Central and South Asian countries. Regionalism plays a vital role in the form of robust institutional mechanisms which enable countries to cooperate. The advanced mechanism in international relations has been going through a profound transformation and evolutionary development. New regionalism or regionalization has emerged as a significant trend in international affairs. In the past few decades, the political and economic dynamics of the international arena have evolved immensely. The global power equation has marked a gradual but drastic shift from unipolarity to multipolarity. Power is no longer integrated with one center and dispersed across multiple poles of the world. Therefore, cooperation among regional countries can be maximized through the construction of a physical institutional

framework. The focus area of these regional institutions can be multi-dimensional, i.e., trade, macroeconomics, and the provision of public goods, including education, health, academia, tourism, and natural resources. In this aspect, there is a need to understand the importance of academic institutions to enhance Central-South Asian regional integration.

Significance of Central-South Asia Regional Cooperation: Role of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev

Regional connectivity is the key mantra in today's political and economic discourse. It is significant for the socio-economic development of any state. The broader cooperation offers a rationale for upgrading and revising the world's narratives and policies to match pace with the time. In this aspect, the grand initiative of "*Central and South Asia Regional Connectivity*", proposed by the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev, is pertinent to highlight and disseminate. The concept has been advocated to highlight the broader foreign policy objectives of Uzbekistan in contemporary times. The grand proposal of rejuvenating Central-South Asian nations will be a game-changer for a progressive and shared future. His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev has rightly felt the need to align countries that share great historical, spiritual, and cultural linkages. Central and South Asia have interacted with each other since ancient times. New knowledge, scientific achievements, and cultural and spiritual values were spread along the Great Silk and Indo-Gangetic Roads. The peoples of both regions were within the framework of common state formations - the Bactrian and Kushan kingdoms, the Türkic kaganate, the Ghaznavid states, the Timurids, and the Baburids. Unfortunately, in the 19th century, the interregional cooperation between was broken. Multiple barriers arose, and the era of cooperation was replaced by a period of confrontation and mistrust. However, in contemporary times, the world has entered into an era of global geopolitical transformations, which bring both challenges and new opportunities. The rise of Uzbekistan's potential role both within and outside the Central Asian block has been witnessed due to the commendable efforts of incumbent Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Uzbekistan has become a significant regional player to connect Central Asia with South Asia via successful economic development programs. Moreover, the third Renaissance declared by the President of Uzbekistan is likely to bring fruitful outcomes and integrate other regional states. Constructive reforms have been announced under the third Renaissance. The Renaissance period is amid contemporary reforms, policy

framework, and innovative dimensions, paving the way for regional integration, economic cooperation, and building a wider understanding of mutual interests.

Prospects for Academic Cooperation under Central-South Asia Regional Connectivity:

Multilateral relations between Central and South Asia, especially Pakistan and Uzbekistan, are on the new road of development because of the connectivity concept. Many projects of inclusive economic development have been initiated between Central and South Asia. However, there is a stark need to strengthen educational linkages between both regions. In this aspect, one of the ten-points agenda proposed by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev can be considered as a guideline. The proposal aimed to set up a joint collaborative research center or a forum for free flow of knowledge amid scholarly input and exchanges. In this aspect, reinvigorating cooperation in the fields of science, technology, and innovation is a dire need of time. The importance of stimulating joint research and exchange programs, as well as introducing a simplified visa regime for scientists and researchers must be the key priority. Student and intellectuals exchange programs always enhance cognitive thinking ability and play a crucial role in character building. It provides new ways to harness socio-economic and cultural dynamics between countries, including career opportunities, personality development, learning multiple cultures, languages, and getting international exposure. Many Central Asian Republics, especially Uzbekistan, have been taking significant initiatives to enhance academic linkages by providing scholarships. In this aspect, easy visa regimes and conducive scholarship opportunities would result in increasing people-to-people contacts. In the era of globalization, media plays a vital role in connecting countries. Thereby, media can be an effective tool to promote socio-cultural and educational relations between Central and South Asian countries. Cultural diplomacy is an essence for soft power projection and enhancing tourism potential. Uzbekistan, along with other Central Asian governments, has been extending efforts to develop such linkages. Pakistan, as a close ally, appreciates and supports this remarkable initiative. Pakistan is ready to enhance the sphere of cooperation in multiple fields to curtail the difference, promote friendly relations, enhance cultural integration, and promote academic linkage.



THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION: CASE STUDY OF CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA

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The narrative of reviving Central and South Asian regional connectivity by President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev holds immense significance in contemporary times. Central and South Asia have been religiously, spiritually, and culturally connected since ancient times. The Old Silk Route gave impetus in making both regions a hub of global connectivity and economic activities. Now, with the idea of Central-South Asian regional cooperation, Uzbekistan has emerged as a strong country in the realm of political sphere. Moreover, the proactive role of the leadership under the visionary statesman, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has contributed manifolds towards Uzbekistan's global outreach. The open policy structure and enhanced regional footprints have paved the way for the country to acquire a great place in the comity of nations. Uzbekistan has

been playing a dynamic role in interregional cooperation. However, there is a dire need to create awareness on such emerging trends and patterns. In this aspect, the role of media is equally pertinent for creating awareness of emerging concepts, disseminating facts, projecting soft power diplomacy, and enhancing people-to-people contacts via cultural diplomacy. The conceptual framework with relevance to media's role, highlights the trends in regionalization. For example, educating and informing public, building collectively, creating a platform for public interactions, increasing public awareness through electronic or print media, enhanced public acceptance and developments. Thus, media is an important sphere to consolidate relations and dialogue among the states in diplomatic affairs.

Media plays an important role in establishing and perpetuating social norms. 'Pen is mightier than sword", an old proverb, seems to be true even in today's context due to the media's proactive role in modern society. As rightly said by Thomas Carlyle, that media is the Fourth Pillar of democracy in any country. Media is the reflection of our society, and it depicts what and how society works. Media, either print, electronic, or the digital, is the only medium, which helps make people informed. It also helps in entertaining the public, educate and make people aware of the current happenings.

Role of Media in Promoting Regional Cooperation:

The media serves the political system and hold society together a cohesive tool. The other major functions of media are correlation, cultural transmission, entertainment, mobilization, personal identity, social integration and interaction, information, surveillance and above all creating awareness among various strata of milieu. Furthermore, media seeks to fill the gap in the field of communication within the international system by providing quick information. It also establishes a functional media that enhances progressive, economic, socio-

political and cultural development as well as mutual co-operation and action. Under these assertions, it seems clear that the media's constructive role cannot be negated. Pakistan's media is playing a prominent role in creating awareness on Central and South Asia regional cooperation. The media's global outreach and constructive part in providing updated information on each event around the globe makes it significant for enhancing cultural linkages. The media has become a powerful tool of communication and interaction in the evolving world. During the early age of advancement, media was not only informative but also contributed towards the development of a civilized society. Thereby, it has been considered a mirror of society. Mobilization of mass communication is another pertinent feature to promote regional understandings and curtail the communication imbalance problem. Media has to play a more positive role in bridging the communication gaps between South-Central Asia, eradicating differences, and help to attain shared goals.

Role of Media in Integrating Regions: Case Study of Central-South Asia:

The freedom of media is a blessing, and it has been clear from the above-mentioned role of media that it will facilitate to enhance people-to-people contacts, regional connectivity, projecting the soft image, and promoting common norms and culture. With increased media and internet outreach, more avenues of information have been created, i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and different social media applications. Thereby, it has become conducive for people to attain information via these sources. The media of Uzbekistan and Pakistan has shown great responsibility in bridging communication barriers. The media must foster its cooperation in creating awareness, linking people, and reviving old-cultural and religious ties. The positive role of media would add proactively to the national progress and project a country's true picture. The ten-point agenda proposed by the Uzbek president in the 15th-16 July international conference holds immense importance. Hence, a joint responsibility of media is to disseminate information regarding this grand initiative of connectivity so that countries and people can strive for a better shared future. The

role of media in recent circumstances should be a kind of solidarity building. The media should be part of the solution to common problems. In this aspect, the media must devise a suitable means of promoting the ten-point agenda by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev for the region's progressive activities to the world. The benefits remain colossal for both regions to realize the ambition of regional integration. The media practitioners must shift to indigenous ways of news reportage. Suffice it to say that no matter how governments try to unite themselves under different circumstances, integration would remain pivotal to enhance people-to-people contacts. The media could provide effective integration pattern for Central-South Asian togetherness through revitalizing the regional pools and other news agencies from Central Asian Republics. Moreover, the media could provide effective integration through the establishment of pan



Central-South Asian joint broadcaster. Freedom of the press is another way by which the media could tackle the challenges in the way of regional integration. Of course, one cannot talk of the intra-regional flow of information without the freedom of the press, which is the very basis for an independent and vibrant media.



MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN SECURITY AND STABILITY TO COMBAT COMMON CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

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The ‘Greater regional connectivity and socio-economic integration’ is the unique vision of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan. The President unveiled this vision on the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly as a louder and clearer message while addressing the leadership of the entire international community. Indeed, it was a great step forward towards the restoration of historical relationships and creating an association between South and Central Asian regions. The primary focus of the vision was to build bridges and create linkages while reviving the old Silk Road, which historically brought closer together the people from these regions of Asia. The connectivity and social integration will provide the governments of these regions to freely and securely interact at two levels; intra-region (state to state) and inter-region. As done historically through Silk Road, the connectivity and social integration will bring the

people of these two regions closer together to benefit from each other. The vision aimed to achieve greater regional integration of South and Central Asia to promote regional harmony, peace and stability while addressing the social and economic concerns of all the regional states and people alike. Unfortunately, both regions have suffered a long period of instability and militancy, which did not allow them to flourish and develop like the European Union and ASEAN regions. Currently, there is a realization among the masses and leaders like President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to promote regionalism and integration by taking collective measures for strengthening regional security and combating the

common challenges in South and Central Asia. Under the prevailing regional and international environment, this was the most needed initiative taken by the Uzbek President. Contemporary Central Asia, historically known as West Turkestan, emerged as a significant region in Asia sequel to the disintegration of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The geopolitical location of the region attracted the major powers for establishing their diplomatic and political relationships soon after their independence. Nevertheless, regional geo-economics was yet another area of interest for regional states, major powers, and the European Union to establish their closer ties with Central Asia. In a bid to get closer to these states by regional and global players, the Central Asian region became a potential source of conflict instead a source of cooperation. The conflicts of major powers and regional countries for their respective influences over the regional countries of Central Asia led towards the destabilization of the region on various pretexts. Militancy based on ethnicity and religious extremism was defining factor of these conflicts. In the last three decades, this region experienced “conflicts over borders, political revolutions, violent labour unrest and inter-ethnic violence.” Besides, the regime changes to empower their favourite was yet another factor, major powers pursued for their influence until the first decade of the 21st century. In a way, most of the post-independence security challenges Central Asian states face to their origin from the interests of major powers and regional states. There exists traditional commonality between South and Central Asia in terms of culture, religion and economic connections. A huge population of Central Asia migrated to South Asia in ancient times, which impacted South Asian culture, religion and common human values besides economic exchanges. In South Asia, most of the security challenges have their origin from the cold war politics of regional dominance by the United States and the former Soviet Union. Apart from disputed regions and unjustified border distributions, the strategic culture and political divide between Pakistan and India have further intensified the security challenges for the entire South Asian region. Today, South Asian states are more divided than the Central Asian states. Indeed, there are serious security challenges in South Asia based on the rivalry of regional states. These rivalries are provoked and exploited by new forms of warfare; hybrid warfare, 5th generation warfare and non-kinetic warfare, where perception building and militancy have taken centre stage. Nevertheless, there still exists the cold war model of major powers dominance over the regional politics of South Asia through transformed goals of geopolitics and geo-economics with some new international players, trying to reduce the influence of each other and the older ones.

Away from the region-specific security challenges, there is a common threat to the security of South and Central Asia. In order to determine the common security threat to both geographical regions of Asia, scholars of security study consider the emerging situations in Afghanistan as the most dangerous security challenge. Indeed, the independence of Central Asian states was the direct consequence of the Afghan war of the 1980s. Afghan guerrilla warfare, commonly known as the war of ideologies between Muslims and the Communist regime of the former Soviet Union, covertly supported by US, was a blessing for the independence of Central Asian states. However, ensuring the security situation in Afghanistan continues even today. It has troubled the region to the maximum. Indeed, the post-2001 situation paved the way for some regional states and occupying powers to use Afghan soil against countries like Pakistan and geographically contiguous states of Central Asia. While in Afghanistan, these countries have been promoting terrorism in Pakistan and instability in Central Asia and Kashgar, the Xinjiang autonomous region of China.

Uzbek President H.E Shavkat Mirziyoyev

has also identified the same problem, which hurdles the larger regional connectivity and economic integration between South and Central Asia. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, following the pull-out of US and NATO forces though regarded positively, yet there is a lot of apprehension with the Taliban way of rule. With the current format, the Taliban rule is insupportable for most Afghan masses and almost the entire international community. Indeed, it is not in line with the basic teachings and essence of Islam even. The main measure for strengthening the security and stability and to combat the common challenges in South and Central Asia should be the stabilization of Afghanistan through an intimate regional engagement. It is essential to devise a regional mechanism for the positive engagement of the Taliban to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. A peaceful Afghanistan will guarantee the broader regional connectivity and integration of South and Central Asian regions in line with the vision of H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA: REVITALIZING CULTURAL LINKAGES

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Central and South Asia have a long history of economic and cultural connections. Both geographical regions share a history of mutual relations dating back to ancient times. From ancient Scythians and Parthians to medieval Ghaznavids, Ghorids, Ghulamans, Khaljis, Tughluqs, and lastly, the Mughals, most of the ruling dynasties of South Asia had their origin in Central Asia. During this period, hundreds of poets, writers, Sufis, ulama, artists, and common people migrated from Central Asia to South Asia, contributing significantly to South Asia's literature, culture, history, science, art and architecture. As a result, cultural and religious influences spread in both regions. The regional connectivity broke up when the British colonized India on the one hand, and Russia wrapped up the Central Asian States on the other hand. Now, it is time to revitalize the economic and cultural linkages for shared economic prosperity and

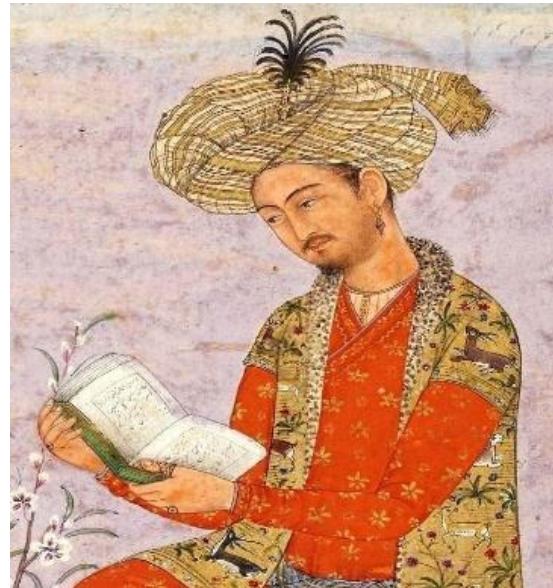
cultural harmony. The recent international conference on "Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity, Challenges and Opportunities" is a great step in this regard. The conference was an initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The main purpose of this conference was to foster a collaborative mission and direction towards a more prosperous future between Central and South Asia.

A Brief Historical Background of the Connectivity of Central and South Asia

The regions of the Central and South Asia have a long historic heritage of connectivity. Cultural and Trade exchange was nurtured along with the ‘Old Silk Route with the traders of India in the areas of Kashgar, Yarkand (China), Khotan, Muram, and Qara-Shahr in Central Asia. Later, a conquest-cum-immigrants movement was witnessed from Afghanistan and Central Asia. From the expeditions of Mahmud Ghazni to the establishment of the Sultanate period, the region of South Asia went through socio-economic, political and cultural transformation. The real change was observed when Zaheer ud Din Babur from Central Asia ended the era of the Delhi Sultanate and established Mughal Dynasty in India in 1526. Indeed, the liberal policies of Mughals towards all communities created cultural harmony in India.

Revitalizing Economic and Cultural Linkages: A Great Initiative by Shavkat Mirziyoyev

The International Conference on “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity: Challenges and Opportunities” was held on 15-16 July 2021 at the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He



convened this initiative to foster economic activities in the region. In fact, the main objective of the conference was to strengthen historically close and friendly ties, trust and good-neighboringly between Central and South Asia in the collective interest of both the regions. The conference was attended by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, foreign ministers and high representatives of the Central and South Asian countries, other foreign states, heads of authoritative international and regional organizations, global financial institutions and companies, leading research and analytical centers.

Key Areas of Cooperation

There are many areas of cooperation, particularly trade, investment, transport, energy, education and innovation, green technologies, implementation of specific projects and cooperation programs, enhancing interaction in tourism,

education, healthcare, science and culture, ensuring the stability and security of the two regions. There is an utter need to remove trade barriers and liberalize economic activities through modern technology and a sound infrastructure for the shared prosperity of both the regions strengthening cultural ties with the help of tourism and people-to-people contact. The improvement of human development, specifically enabling youth with modern science and education, was also one of the important sectors to establish linkages. The energy-rich region of Central Asia would benefit the energy starve region of South Asia. The role of Afghanistan is also one of the important points of regional cooperation. Its demographic position acts as a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia. That is why the construction project for the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway is underway to allow Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states to reduce the transport costs for the delivery of goods to foreign markets. Therefore, durable peace in Afghanistan is imperative for the achievement of these cherished goals of connectivity. Furthermore, the Uzbek leadership ready to address challenges and threats to regional security, prosperity, and stability through collective effort. That is why the international community, international organizations gave a positive response to the initiative. President of the Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated, “Without tighter relationships and economic connectivity, we cannot turn this part of the world, and the Eurasian continent into a stable and prosperous ~~part~~ Although connectivity is not just about economics, it drives regional cooperation and encourages friendly relations among neighbours.

Conclusion: The historical linkage between the Central and South Asia is very old. Since the era of Mahmood Ghaznvi, the people of Afghanistan and Central Asia flocked to South Asia as conquerors and settlers and transformed the region's socio-economic, cultural and political landscape. This period came to an end when the British overtook India in its hand. On the other side, Central Asia came under the control of the Tsar of the Soviet Union. Afghanistan served as a buffer state during this period. The recent conference “*“Jāraqat-e-Sindhu”* is a genuine effort by the president of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev to revive cultural and economic connectivity between both the regions. The initiative aimed at boosting trade and business through efficient infrastructure and economic liberalism. It also stressed the political stability of Afghanistan, as the country acts as the gateway between Central and South Asia. All in all, the participants agreed to work together as interconnectedness and collectivism would certainly benefit both regions.

PAKISTAN: A CONNECTING HUB OF TRADE IN CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

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In the age of “globalization”, a “miracle” has now been achieved. The long-awaited “dreams” of greater regional connectivity between the Central Asian Region and South Asia have been materialized. The first-ever containerized shipment from Pakistan under “Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR)” finally reached Tashkent in 48 hours from Torkham. It validates the “strategic vision” of the leadership of Uzbekistan and Pakistan about greater regional connectivity. It has been “colossal” human efforts of both sides in which strong political commitment and economic inspiration play a vital role. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been working for greater regional connectivity between the Central Asian Region (CAR) and the South Asian Region (SAR). Now, in collaboration with TCS Logistics Pakistan, it succeeded in its first pilot shipment to Central Asia under the Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) Convention.

It was destined for Uzbekistan, departed Karachi on April 29, 2021 and arrived in Tashkent via the Karachi-Kabul-Termez route on May 4, 2021. It is indeed a “significant step” in Pakistan’s transit trade history as Pakistan Customs processed the first-ever TIR consignment, which has multiplier socio-economic effects. It has further increased connectivity with trading partners, vital for viable trade relations between Central Asia and Pakistan. The successful transmission of TIR has been Pakistan’s long-term vision for trade and economic relations with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Central Asian Republics (CARs) has now transformed Pakistan into a hub for trade, transit, and trans-shipment. The structure and efficient connectivity networks of all the participatory countries play a

vital role in access to markets and should be considered an important attribute for trade competitiveness. It is the first in a series of five planned trial cargos transmit to CARs through Afghanistan and China to test the viability of various routes for international transit to Central Asia and beyond under the TIR Convention, documenting the associated operational and logistical operations challenges during the journey. It hopes that the successful execution of the first pilot to Tashkent will be a confidence booster among traders and transport operators from both sides to adopt TIR for cross border trade and transit and boost regional trade integration and connectivity. Moreover, it hopes that successful “operationalization” and “channelization” of the TIR will further enhance Pakistan’s comparative advantage with geostrategic location and geo-economy predominance and increase its international trade. In this context, its current meaningful step of commercial diplomacy with Pakistan and Uzbekistan will speed up this vision of befitting proposition of regional connectivity between Central Asia and South Asia. In this, Pakistan may be connecting hub in the days to come. The consignment comprised of herbal medicines crossed into Afghanistan after the completion of all customs formalities

at Torkham. It will establish a new era of direct land-route trade with the CARs. The TIR system will hopefully streamline border procedure, cutting time and money for trade and transport operators and resultantly will be greater regional connectivity, immense socio-economic prosperity, and finally, great in & outflow of commodities between the two important regions. It is the beginning of a new era enabling free movement of trucks between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs). It is also labeled as it first step towards the opening of bilateral trade with Uzbekistan and beyond. It is expected that trade must be based on the secure, open, consistent, reliable, and legal movement of goods at the Afghan border, along with enhanced connectivity with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and CARs. After a delay of 30 months, the first-ever shipment under the Convention on the International Transport of Goods for traffic-in-transit of goods across the border reached the capital of Uzbekistan. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) notified rules for the implementation of TIR in October 2017. More than 77 countries, including Afghanistan, have acceded to the TIR convention so far. As a result, the Afghan government will not check Pakistani trucks carrying goods to Central Asian countries. It will also ensure



uninterrupted flows of trucks across the Pak-Afghan border. The Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets called the TIR Convention, came into force in March 1978, and it replaced the original Transport Internationaux Routier (TIR) of 1959. The TIR Convention facilitates international transit through simplified Customs transit procedures and an international guarantee system. Customs procedure takes place at origin and destination rather than at each border crossing using a single guarantee. TIR covers the whole of Europe and reaches out to North Africa and the Near and Middle East. More than 33,000 operators are authorized to use the TIR system and around 1.5 million TIR transports are carried out per year. For the further strengthening of bilateral relations in diverse sectors of economy, trade & commerce, joint venture, FDIs, infrastructural development, education, tourism and last but not the least, security and defense cooperation, the leaders of Pakistan and Uzbekistan held

many meetings for the said purpose. The Trans-Afghan Railway Line Project was signed and agreed between Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan this year. It hopes that project will link the Central Asian transport network with Pakistan's seaports of Gwadar, Karachi, and Qasim. It will transform the geo-economic dynamics of the entire region. Both leaders agreed to the early finalization of a preferential trade deal and transit trade agreement between the two countries which will boost collaboration in the fields of economy, defense, education, culture, and tourism. Uzbekistan president appreciated Pakistan's efforts to facilitate the Afghan peace process and termed the current situation as a historic opportunity that Afghans must seize to achieve an inclusive, broad-based, and comprehensive negotiated political settlement. Consequently, the two sides signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding, including for developing further cooperation in agriculture, mutual



recognition in the fields of conformity assessment of products, standardization, metrology and technical assistance, and an agreement on defense cooperation, according to the statement. Central Asia also figures prominently in various other initiatives and plans for enhancing connectivity and integration across Europe and Asia. These include the European Union's TRACECA1 initiative and the New Silk Road (NSR), the International North-South Transport Corridor or the proposed Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) 2 corridors. South Asia has now become pivotal to Uzbekistan's dynamic foreign policy. It will further diversify its options for accessing the sea other than the Iranian ports. The Uzbek government is actively working with Central Asian and South Asian countries to organize a high-level activity to discuss the pros and cons of joint ventures. Uzbekistan desires to have easy and smooth access to Pakistan ports. Rigorous commercial diplomacy has now widened the scope of regional connectivity, due to which now various routes are available for regional connectivity between the CAR and SAR. The opportunity to access the same Pakistani ports via China, bypassing Afghanistan is also on the advanced stage. It would go via the Karakoram Highway, which connects Gilgit-Baltistan

to China's Xinjiang region. Being a prominent regional expert of Uzbekistan & CARs, I would suggest that enhanced banking & financial integration and cooperation is necessary for further strengthening bilateral relations between the two sides. Swapping of currencies may provide all participatory sides, especially Pakistan and Uzbekistan, to enhance trade volumes. Close liaison in diverse sectors of Islamic Banking, Micro-Financing and SME may further enhance economic relations between the two countries in the days to come. Befitting propositions in agriculture, vegetables, fisheries, pharmaceuticals, sports commodities, textiles, garments, automobiles, and finally, dry fruits may revolutionize bilateral trade between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. "Colored" cotton and newly cultivated crop of "Saffron" of Uzbekistan would be a value-addition in terms of bilateral trade. Joint ventures in affordable automobiles may open a grand opening for both countries private sectors to make huge investments. Moreover, energy cooperation would be a win-win proposition for both countries in the days to come. Cooperation in military fields, training, production, and joint venture may further consolidate regional peace and harmony. Matters of human and drugs trafficking, and

uniformity of customs would be a giant step for further strengthening of bilateral relations. Tourism may be further accelerated by forming a Joint Tourist Company (JTC). The pace of infrastructural development and cooperation may also be patronized by forming a joint Infrastructural Development Company (IDC). A Joint Chamber of Commerce (JCC) would be a confidence booster for the private sector. Reciprocal Trade Houses (RTHs) would be a value-addition for promoting trade & commerce activities between the two countries in the future. To conclude, the formation of Corridors of Knowledge (CK) would further enhance educational, cultural, and finally, people-to-people ties between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. In this regard, the Center of Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS) may play a vigorous role because of its vast and dynamic experts and expertise. Its constant persuasion in holding constructive regional dialogue (ISRS, Uzbekistan, and various universities), interactive sessions with policy makers, opinion makers, regular seminars and conferences since its beginning is now paying dividends of greater regional cooperation and connectivity.

REINVIGORATING COOPERATION IN THE FIELDS OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION BETWEEN CENTRAL & SOUTH ASIA

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The concept of Science diplomacy has paved its way in the contemporary dynamics of regional and global cooperation. It is one of the most effective tools for creating linkages, partnerships, and effective diplomatic relations amongst countries, and regions. The collective advantages of cooperation in the fields of science, technology, and innovation, as well as academic collaborations amongst the region, contribute to addressing common problems and building sound international partnerships. Science diplomacy is not new, but its importance has gradually increased keeping in view the current global challenges. The obstacles faced by the global community require modern and scientific solutions. This article will highlight the need for science diplomacy and the necessity of reinvigorating cooperation in the fields of science, technology, and innovation between Central & South Asia to enhance connectivity.

The Initiative by President of Uzbekistan for Central & South Asia Connectivity:

The historic idea presented by His Excellency Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Central and South Asia connectivity has opened up new avenues of cooperation in the region. It has allowed the neighborly countries to explore the untapped potential of this region. Where diplomacy is the cornerstone of all bilateral ties, other sectors also require attention and efforts for ensuring shared prosperity and development. The idea of the third Renaissance by the President of Uzbekistan has incorporated all important areas of cooperation that must be considered while working towards Central and South Asia

connectivity. While presenting his ten-point agenda for Central and South Asia connectivity, he mentioned the need for high achievements in the field of science, technology, and innovation for the accelerated development of our countries and region. Historically, scientific knowledge, innovations, and achievements were spread across the Great Silk and Indo-Gangetic roads. Today, the people of Central and South Asia have the perfect opportunity to revive and reinvigorate the element of scientific and technological cooperation between states. Steps must be taken to ensure this connectivity and to facilitate people of the region for improved resources, access to information and knowledge, and enhanced contacts between the scientific community and innovators of the Central & South Asia region.

Introduction of a Facilitated Visa Regime for Scientists and Researchers
Countries in the Central & South Asia region have been epicentres of science, technology, and innovation. Researchers and scientists of the region have earned laurels on prestigious platforms. To facilitate the scientific community of the region, it is important to formulate a suitable visa regime for their continued contact and collaboration. The President

of Uzbekistan has always supported the idea of inviting scientists and researchers from the region and connecting them with like-minded people in the region. The idea of a facilitated visa regime for scientists and researchers will result in building a constructive knowledge corridor contributing to innovations and developments in the region.

Joint Innovation Centers, Scientific Clusters and Technology Parks

The commendable efforts taken by the Uzbekistan leadership for the promotion of science and technology can be extended to Central and South Asia. The people of this region can be facilitated through these initiatives, by adopting similar measures in their countries. This will not only create more opportunities for technological development but will also play its part in connecting the scientific community of Central & South Asia. Special attention to the expansion of science and research activities as well as new institutions and centers for the promotion of innovation is needed. Similar to the international conference on Central & South Asia connectivity, an international conference can be organized to bring ministries of science and technology, scientists, researchers, and young innovators from Central &

South Asia on one platform. Resulting in closer contacts, exchange of new ideas, and promotion of friendly ties between scientists and innovators of the region. This initiative will also help in inspiring other countries to focus on increasing the number of innovation centers, scientific clusters, and technology parks.

Platforms for Cooperation between Universities and Research Centers in Central-South Asia.

Education, awareness, and knowledge are the building blocks of success for any developing country. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has made an impeccable suggestion to establish Platforms for cooperation between universities and research centers in Central and South Asia. The practical implementation of this idea has been witnessed between the countries of Central & South Asia in the context of universities, think tanks, media channels, and other entities. To extend this cooperation to the scientific research centers and establishing a joint and common platform for the scientific community is highly advisable. It will play an important role in rejuvenating the cooperation between Central & South Asia. It will also immensely contribute to the combined efforts of technological innovation in the region by experts and practitioners of specialized scientific

fields. Educational Internships & Specialized Programs for the Exchange of Experience, Techniques & Scientific Knowledge. Regional development is driven by sharing relevant knowledge, collecting ideas, and exchanging information for innovation and scientific development. Knowledge and useful technique is meant to be shared with partners and like-minded people for its better utilization. To achieve scientific collaboration between Central & South Asia it is important to share achievements, knowledge, and new ideas to form a successful alliance of revolution in technology and innovation. Development without science and technology is impossible in the current era. To keep up with the fast-changing world and the global technological transformation countries of Central & South Asia must collaborate in specialized programs for the exchange of experiences, successful techniques, and relevant scientific knowledge. Discussing strengths and weaknesses, areas of collaboration, technology, and new ideas paves the way for new inventions that positively contribute to various sectors of a country. It is eminent that countries of this region are blessed with natural resources, its people are talented and gifted and to make the most of these advantages, specialized programs should

be crafted to facilitate them. Workshops, exchange programs, short courses, and internships should be promoted to escalate first-hand information, knowledge, and practical experiences of scientists, researchers, and practitioners. Initiating this program for scientists in the fields of common interest such as Artificial Intelligence and agriculture can prove to be a turning point for these industries. Science and technology Expos, competitions, and seminars can also be arranged to motivate and attract young researchers to these fields and share their innovative ideas for development. The initiative of Central and South Asia Connectivity can be used as an effective tool for unearthing the hidden gems in this region. Science, technology, and innovation are essential for development, special attention and focused efforts towards reinvigorating these factors amongst others can play an important role in bringing together like-minded individuals with an aim for a new renaissance in Central and South Asia.



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