Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

Reviving Central South Asian Regional Connectivity: A Grand Narrative by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev

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Jointly organized by Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad &
Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islamabad

Published on 24th February 2022

Connectivity with the intra-regional and inter-regional alliances is a prerequisite for attaining prosperity in all the social, political, and economic dimensions. Connectedness has always proven to be fruitful in times of history. For countries of Central Asia, South Asia in a broader context has served as a gateway to geo-strategically important countries like China or the Middle East. The epoch of history shows that the geopolitical split in South Asia during the Great Game and the conflict in Afghanistan served as a major obstacle for reviving the relationship between Central and South Asia (Yakubov, 2021).

However, the 21st century has paved the way for countries to develop strengthened diplomatic relations based on cooperation and regional alignments. In this era of transformation, the rise of Uzbekistan as a potential holding state within and outside the region of Central Asia due to vigorous policies and excellency of their President is worth praising in all aspects. The idea of Central-South Asian connectivity focuses on broader paradigms, including enhancing economic growth along with the revival of cultural and humanitarian ties between the states of the region. Various policies regarding countering security threats and improving cross broader security infrastructure are all included under the grand narrative of Uzbekistan provided by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev (Akram, 2021).

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South Asia is the most potential region in the world, with a population of almost 1.89 billion. Even Pakistan which is geographically the closest state to Central Asia has a population of over 230 million. The country's favorable geostrategic location along with cultural and ethnic ties are considered the ray of hope for Uzbekistan in many aspects. Pakistan has welcomed the great initiative of Uzbekistan that is essential in terms of reviving historical, cultural, and spiritual ties. Pakistan has wholeheartedly praised the idea of connectivity commenced by Uzbekistan and is looking forward to the practical implementation of this grand idea (Sahi & Khan, 2021).

Pakistan and Uzbekistan Cooperation under Central-South Asian Connectivity:

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev believes that despite having cultural similarities between Central and South Asian states, there is a need for more coordination and cooperation between the two regions. Thus, the concept of reviving regional Central and South Asian connectivity covers potential aspects. Firstly, cooperation can pave the way for opportunities for the bulk of youth residing in both regions. In this aspect, cultural exchange programs for youth will boost higher people-to-people contacts (Ezatullah, 2021). The significant market potential of Central Asia through the means of regional connectivity has also given European Union to foster reliable partnerships with the

regional countries. The narratives of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev have made a pathway for EU partners to collaborate in regional cooperation (EEAS, 2021). Thus, it also provides a great market for South Asian countries as well.

Secondly, Central and South Asia can support each other in the energy sector. The successful projects of the past, including gas pipeline and other projects of electricity from Republics of Central Asia to Pakistan, have worked out successfully (IPS, 2015). Moreover, the growing energy demands of Uzbekistan can be addressed through such collaboration between the regions. Recently, the ministers of Uzbekistan and Pakistan have had a meeting. They discussed the most important energy projects, including the execution of the TAPI gas pipeline linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India through a billion-dollar gas pipeline project. This is yet another manifestation of fruitful joint collaboration. (Kiani, 2022).

Thirdly, to strengthen bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, both countries have signed several MOUs for cooperation in all the sectors of mutual interests. Since economic development is the core of the National Security Policy of Pakistan, the recent commencement of trade on the free movement of goods alongside cooperation on military education has paved the way for future cooperation in fields of mutual interests (Ezatullah, 2021).

The third Renaissance in Uzbekistan will bring many opportunities for the regional countries. Pakistan has assured that it will continue to support Uzbekistan in bigger

initiatives. Moreover, the regional connectivity would also help Afghanistan to deal with the fragile economy and humanitarian crisis (Carll, 2021).

Conclusion:

A grand narrative taken by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev is a launched pad for both of the regions. The steps for cooperation in key areas are all aimed at bridging the gap and enhancing people-to-people contacts (Hashimova, 2021). The construction of the railroad project Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar will also result in economic expansions of both regions. (Hashimova, Uzbekistan Pushing to Realize the Trans Afghan Railroad , 2021).

It would be pertinent to say that the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has revived the huge network of connectivity between Central and South Asian states. Uzbekistan has succeeded through the narratives of revitalizing old historical ties. As for a prosperous region, connectivity and collaboration are the key determinates to achieving growth in social, political, and economic dimensions. In a nutshell, the grand narrative has given a new impetus to stimulate cooperation between South-Central Asia with a forward-looking spirit.

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