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REASSESSING UZBEKISTAN-INDIA RELATIONS: HISTORICAL LINKAGES, CONTEMPORARY ENGAGEMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Uzbekistan-India relations represent a distinctive case of enduring civilizational continuity combined with evolving contemporary cooperation. Rooted in centuries of interaction facilitated by the Silk Road, the relationship has been shaped by sustained exchanges in trade, culture, religion, art, and intellectual traditions. Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, bilateral relations entered a new phase marked by formal diplomatic engagement, institutional cooperation, and expanding strategic dialogue. This paper examines the transformation of Uzbekistan-India relations in the post-Cold War era, with particular emphasis on political diplomacy, economic collaboration, security cooperation, and cultural and educational exchanges. It highlights India's growing engagement in Uzbekistan in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, information technology, healthcare, education, energy, and capacity building, alongside Uzbekistan's importance in India's Central Asia policy. Furthermore, the study analyzes cooperation within multilateral frameworks, notably the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), where both countries share converging interests in regional stability, counterterrorism, and sustainable development. This paper examines the historical foundations of Uzbekistan-India relations and analyzes their contemporary engagements in political, economic, cultural, and security domains. It highlights that shared historical legacies continue to inform present-day cooperation, while new geopolitical and economic realities provide opportunities for deeper partnership in the 21st century.

Keywords: Silk Road, civilizational ties, Central Asia, contemporary diplomacy, strategic partnership.

Индерджит

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Тарихи байланыстар, қазіргі ынтымақтастық және болашақ перспективалар негізінде Өзбекстан-Үндістан қатынастарын қайта бағалау

Өзбекстан мен Үндістан арасындағы қатынастар ғасырлар бойы қалыптасқан өркениеттік сабақтастық пен қазіргі кезеңдегі серпінді ынтымақтастықты ұштастыратын өзіндік сипатқа ие. Ұлы Жібек жолы арқылы орныққан сан ғасырлық байланыстар екі халық арасындағы сауда-саттық, мәдениет, дін, өнер және зияткерлік дәстүрлер салаларындағы өзара ықпалдастықтың дамуына негіз болды.

1991 жылы Өзбекстан тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейін екіжақты қатынастар жаңа кезеңге қадам басты. Бұл кезең ресми дипломатиялық қатынастардың орнығуымен, институционалдық ынтымақтастықтың нығаюымен және стратегиялық диалог аясының кеңеюімен ерекшеленді.

Мақалада қырғи-қабақ соғыс аяқталғаннан кейінгі кезеңде Өзбекстан-Үндістан қатынастарының даму үдерісі қарастырылып, саяси-дипломатиялық байланыстарға, экономикалық әріптестікке, қауіпсіздік саласындағы ынтымақтастыққа, сондай-ақ мәдени және білім беру байланыстарына ерекше назар аударылады. Сонымен қатар Үндістанның Өзбекстандағы фармацевтика, ақпараттық технологиялар, денсаулық сақтау, білім беру, энергетика және адами капиталды дамыту салаларындағы ықпалдастығының кеңеюі сараланады. Өзбекстанның Үндістанның Орталық Азия бағытындағы саясатында алатын орнына да мән беріледі.

Зерттеуде екі елдің көпжақты ынтымақтастық тетіктері аясындағы өзара іс-қимылы, соның ішінде Шанхай ынтымақтастық ұйымы (ШЫҰ) шеңберіндегі әріптестігі де талданады. Аталған ұйым аясында Өзбекстан мен Үндістанның өңірлік тұрақтылықты нығайту, терроризмге қарсы іс-қимыл және орнықты дамуды қамтамасыз ету мәселелеріндегі мүдделері өзара сабақтасады.

Мақалада Өзбекстан-Үндістан қатынастарының тарихи негіздері зерделеніп, олардың саяси, экономикалық, мәдени және қауіпсіздік салаларындағы қазіргі ынтымақтастығы талданады.

Зерттеу ортақ тарихи мұраның бүгінгі екіжақты қатынастардың сипаты мен мазмұнына ықпалын сақтап отырғанын, ал қалыптасып келе жатқан жаңа геосаяси және экономикалық жағдайлар ХХІ ғасырда екі ел арасындағы әріптестікті одан әрі тереңдетуге қолайлы мүмкіндіктер туғызатынын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: Ұлы Жібек жолы, өркениеттік байланыстар, Орталық Азия, қазіргі дипломатия, стратегиялық әріптестік.

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Переосмысление узбекско-индийских отношений: исторические связи, современное взаимодействие и перспективы развития

Узбекско-индийские отношения представляют собой особый пример сочетания многовековой цивилизационной преемственности и динамично развивающегося современного сотрудничества. Их исторические основы были заложены в ходе многовекового взаимодействия, важную роль в развитии которого играл Великий шелковый путь. Связи между народами двух стран формировались посредством устойчивых контактов и взаимных обменов в сферах торговли, культуры, религии, искусства и интеллектуальных традиций.

После обретения Узбекистаном независимости в 1991 году двусторонние отношения вступили в новый этап, ознаменованный установлением официальных дипломатических отношений, развитием институционального сотрудничества и расширением стратегического диалога.

В статье рассматривается развитие узбекско-индийских отношений после окончания холодной войны с особым вниманием к политико-дипломатическому взаимодействию, экономическому сотрудничеству, вопросам безопасности, а также культурным и образовательным связям. Особое внимание уделяется расширению сотрудничества Индии с Узбекистаном в таких сферах, как фармацевтика, информационные технологии, здравоохранение, образование, энергетика и наращивание потенциала. Анализируется также место Узбекистана в политике Индии в отношении Центральной Азии.

Кроме того, исследуется взаимодействие двух государств в рамках многосторонних форматов, прежде всего Шанхайской организации сотрудничества (ШОС). В рамках этой организации интересы Узбекистана и Индии во многом совпадают в вопросах обеспечения региональной стабильности, противодействия терроризму и содействия устойчивому развитию.

В статье анализируются исторические предпосылки узбекско-индийских отношений и основные направления их современного взаимодействия в политической, экономической, культурной сферах, а также в области безопасности. Подчеркивается, что общее историческое наследие продолжает оказывать существенное влияние на развитие двусторонних связей, тогда как современные геополитические и экономические процессы создают дополнительные возможности для дальнейшего углубления партнерства между Узбекистаном и Индией в ХХІ веке.

Ключевые слова: Великий шелковый путь, цивилизационные связи, Центральная Азия, современная дипломатия, стратегическое партнерство.

Introduction

Uzbekistan and India occupy pivotal positions in Central and South Asia, respectively, and have long served as cultural and commercial crossroads. Despite geographical distance, the two regions have maintained sustained interactions over centuries. Uzbekistan's independence in 1991 marked a new chapter in Uzbekistan-India relations, allowing the two countries to develop bilateral ties based on sovereign equality, mutual respect, and shared interests. This paper examines the continuity and transformation of the relationship, tracing its evolution from historical interactions to contemporary cooperation.

The relations between India and Uzbekistan date back to ancient times. The roots of the deep and friendly ties between the two countries are deep in history- from the Kushan era to the present day. Al-Biruni (renowned Uzbek scholar in the 11th century) visited India and authored the famous book 'Kitab-Tahqiq-al-Hind' which is considered one of the most prominent studies on 'Indian society and culture'. The 1st Prime Minister (PM) of India Jawaharlal Nehru, visited (in 1955 and 1961) Uzbekistan, when it was under the 'Soviet Rule' (Dwivedi, 2025, p. 1). India was among the first countries to recognise Uzbekistan as a sovereign state following its independence in 1991. The two countries formally

established diplomatic relations through an agreement signed in Tashkent on 18 March 1992. Bilateral ties were elevated to a “strategic partnership” in 2011 and have since been supported by institutional mechanisms at political and official levels that facilitate regular dialogue and bilateral cooperation (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026). Uzbekistan is significant to India due to its ‘geo-strategic location’ at the ‘crossroads of Eurasia’ sharing land borders with all four ‘Central Asian Republics’ and ‘Afghanistan’, as well as its ‘abundant natural resources’ (Roy & Roy, 2020, p. 106).

Material and methods

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to understand or examine the evolution of Uzbekistan-India relations, analyzing from historical foundations to contemporary ties or engagements and emerging opportunities. The research is based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include official documents and reports from the governments of India and Uzbekistan, bilateral agreements, joint statements, publications from the Ministries of External Affairs/Foreign Affairs of both countries. The secondary sources include academic books, and peer-reviewed journal articles. The historical analysis is employed to examine the civilizational, commercial, and cultural ties between the two societies, while thematic analysis is used to assess current cooperation in areas such as (i) Defense, (ii) Economic relations, (iii) Cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and (iv) Multilateral frameworks. The study also evaluates key constraints affecting bilateral relations- specifically geographical distance, connectivity limitations, relatively low trade volumes, and the need for greater institutional and private sector engagement. This methodology enables the study to assess both the continuity of historical ties and the evolving strategic significance of the bilateral partnership.

Historical foundations

The historical relationship between Uzbekistan and India can be traced back to ancient and medieval periods, particularly through the Silk Road, which facilitated trade, cultural diffusion, and intellectual exchange. Throughout history, ‘Buddhism’ was present in all former ‘Soviet Central Asian Republics’ that were part of Western Turkestan (all ‘Central Asian’ countries were part of Western Turkestan). Initially, in the first century BCE,

it spread from ‘Gandhara’ (Pakistan) and Afghanistan to the kingdoms of ‘Parthia’ and ‘Bactria’. The ‘Turkmenistan’ and ‘Northeastern Iran’ together constituted the ‘kingdom of Parthia’, while southern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and ‘Northern Afghanistan’ formed the ‘kingdom of Bactria’. Buddhism reached the Sogdiana region- comprising central Uzbekistan and northwestern Tajikistan- primarily from Bactria. The 6th-century Chinese pilgrim or traveler Xuanzang described two large ‘Buddhist monasteries’ in Samarkand, the capital of Sogdiana (Sarkar, 2012, p. 48). These five ‘Central Asian’ countries together with Afghanistan and Pakistan are home to ‘Istan Buddhism’, as termed by Chris Stanford. (Mishra, 2012, p. 17). The discovery of ‘Buddhist’ remnants in ‘Kara Tepe’ (near Termez) in Uzbekistan is a testimony to ‘India’s Cultural Influence’ there (Mohapatra, 2021).

India’s historical connections with Uzbekistan developed through sustained political, commercial, socio-cultural, and intellectual exchanges from ancient times through the medieval period. The journey of the renowned scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni from Khwarazm to India represents a significant example of this intellectual interaction. These linkages persisted despite the imperial rivalry between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire. By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, approximately 8,000 Indians were settled in Central Asia, where Indian merchants and communities exercised considerable commercial and social influence. Alexander Burnes’s observations during his visit to Bukhara in the 1830s, including his reference to Punjab-imported turbans being widely worn in Bukhara and Turkestan, further illustrate the enduring commercial and cultural connections between India and Central Asia (Kaushik, 1998).

Indian kings and Namdhari Sikh sent several missions to Tashkent and Samarkand to seek Russian assistance against British colonial rule. Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir dispatched or sent several emissaries to Russian authorities in Central Asia, one of whom reportedly stayed in Samarkand and studied the Russian language at a local school. After returning to Kashmir, he became a Tehsildar (Revenue head of a sub-district). This episode highlights the political, diplomatic, and linguistic dimensions of historical interactions. However, no assistance was forthcoming from the colonial powers of ‘Russia’ and ‘Britain’, as they had no interest in advancing the cause of freedom for the peoples of India or Central Asia. It was only after the 1917 Russian Revolution that many ‘Indian Revolution-

aries' found sympathy and support for their cause in Tashkent; the city became a pivotal hub for their activities under the leadership of M.N. Roy, who established an organization named 'India House' (Kaushik, 2010). The then PM Jawaharlal Nehru visited Uzbekistan with Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1955 and 1961. The PM L. B. Shastri visited 'Tashkent in January 1966', tragically, he passed away there. A road and a school have been named after him, and both a full-size statue and a bust commemorating him in Tashkent (Mavlanov, 2012, p. 144).

In the 1970s, Tashkent began to emerge as a hub for Indology (Indian studies) and Indian languages. Indian films were dubbed and screened in cinemas and on television, gaining immense popularity among the public. The on-screen pairing of Raj Kapoor and Nargis became widely celebrated. It was an era when the craze for Hindi cinema and songs permeated every household, fostering a great deal of goodwill towards India and its people (Koparkar, 2025, p. 34). Uzbekistan Sharaf Rashidov, then First Secretary of the 'Communist Party' led a 'Communist Party of Soviet Union' delegation to India in 1975. In the year 1987, a Consulate General of India was formally inaugurated in Tashkent. India's President R Venkataraman visited Uzbekistan in 1988 and this visit was followed by a visit by PM V.P. Singh in July 1990. (Yadav and Wahlang, 2021, p. 70). The foundation for the post-Soviet era was laid during President Karimov's visit to India from August 17-19, 1991. Several important agreements covering various sectors were signed during the visit. India established its Consulate in Tashkent on 7th April 1987, which was upgraded to an Embassy in March 1992 following Uzbekistan's independence, marking the formal institutionalisation of bilateral diplomatic relations (Dmitrieva & Dhaka, 2025, p. 113; Mavlanov, 2012, p. 145).

Contemporary engagements

India promptly recognized Uzbekistan as a sovereign and independent country following its emergence as an independent state. The agreement to establish diplomatic ties between two countries was signed in 'Tashkent' on '18th March 1992' (Sarkar, 2025, p. 96). Just a few months after the disintegration, India took the initiative to develop a partnership with Uzbekistan across multiple levels. Drawing on longstanding historical and cultural ties, India-Uzbekistan relations have evolved into a multidimensional strategic partnership encompassing trade, connectivity, defence cooperation, and

people-to-people exchanges (Kumar & Bawa, 2025, p. 17).

During the Soviet era, India maintained very close ties with the 'Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic'. Indian leaders frequently visited the capital, Tashkent, and other significant or key locations. In fact, President Islam Karimov was visiting India in his capacity as the Chairman of the 'Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan' just as the process of the USSR's dissolution was unfolding; he was the first among the new leaders of the former 'Soviet Republics' to visit India. Due to sudden developments back home, he had to cut short his visit- which included a trip to Agra, and return to Tashkent. Ambassador Ashok Mukerji, India's last Consul General in Soviet Central Asia, was based in Tashkent during the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Following Uzbekistan's independence, India opened an Embassy in the country in March 1992, marking the transition to formal bilateral diplomatic relations (Singh, 2016). India and Uzbekistan elevated their bilateral relations to a "strategic partnership" in 2011. Since then, various institutional mechanisms at political and official levels have facilitated regular dialogue, consultations, and cooperation on issues of mutual interest (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026).

In the contemporary period, Uzbekistan- India relations have expanded across multiple dimensions. Since diplomatic relations were established in 1992, high-level political exchanges have increased, reflecting mutual interest in regional stability and economic development (Yadav & Wahlang, 2021, p. 68). Since 1992, there have been frequent high level visits. The PM Narasimha Rao visited Tashkent in 1993, PM Manmohan Singh visited Tashkent in 2006, PM Narendra Modi visited Tashkent in 2015 and 2016. President Karimov paid 'State Visits to India' in 1991, 1994, 2000, 2005 and 2011. Present President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has visited India in 2018 and 2019. A virtual 'India-Central Asia Summit' was held in January 2022. President Mirziyoyev attended a virtual meeting of the Head of the States of SCO in July 2023. Bilateral Agreements and Protocols Signed during these visits between Uzbekistan and India. (Dwivedi, 2025, pp. 1-2). Emerging as a global economic power has provided India with the opportunity to play an active role beyond its immediate neighborhood- particularly in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Its policies were designed to enable it to play a significant role in the defense and economic sectors across Asia by forging strategic partnerships with key nations. India has es-

tablished strategic partnerships with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Patnaik, 2026, p. 106).

Defence relations

Since 1992, defence relations between India and Uzbekistan have developed into an important component of their bilateral partnership. Defence cooperation encompasses military training, joint exercises, defence technology, military education, and capacity building. The two countries conduct the 'DUSTLIK' joint military exercise regularly, which focuses on strengthening interoperability and counter-terrorism capabilities. Defence cooperation has progressively expanded through exchanges between the armed forces and institutional-level engagements, emerging as an important component of the broader India-Uzbekistan strategic partnership. Former Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes visited Uzbekistan in February-March 2003 to take delivery of the first of six IL-78 mid-air refuelling aircraft for the 'Indian Air Force' (Dutta, 2003). Mr. Fernandes held a 'Press conference at Tashkent Airport' before departing for the historic Uzbek cities of 'Samarkand' and 'Bukhara'. According to Uzbek radio, no documents were signed during Fernandes's visit to Uzbekistan; the two sides merely discussed 'strengthening military and military-technical cooperation' between both republics (Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, 2003).

To comprehensively expand and deepen bilateral relations, President Karimov visited India again from 'April 4-6, 2005'. The '12 Agreements' and 'MoUs' were signed, during this visit,. The four of these agreements pertained to cooperation in the military and military-technical spheres at the governmental level. India and Uzbekistan shared the view that international terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security. Both countries unequivocally condemned acts of terrorism and called for the early finalisation of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (MEA, GoI, 2005). A significant step in India-Uzbekistan defence relations was taken during the Uzbek President's visit with the signing of the 'Agreement on Cooperation in Military and Military-Technical Areas' between the two countries' Ministries of Defence. The agreement provided a framework for cooperation in several areas, including the exchange of military expertise, development, production and repair of defence equipment, training, and joint military exercises. Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Raksha Mantri, signed the

agreement on behalf of India, while H.E. Dr Kadir Gulomov, Minister of Defence, represented Uzbekistan (MEA, GoI, 2005).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Central Asian republics in July 2015 marked a significant development in India's engagement with the region. Initiatives such as the 'India-Central Asia Dialogue', the 'Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan', and the 'India-Central Asia Leaders Summit' have since strengthened the institutional framework of regional cooperation. Uzbekistan has assumed an important position within this process, particularly through the expansion of bilateral defence cooperation. The growing defence partnership has added a significant strategic dimension to India-Uzbekistan relations. Defense cooperation between the two countries advanced following the visit of Uzbekistan's Defense Minister, Major General Abdusalom Azizov, to India from 'September 4-7, 2018'. India and Uzbekistan have strengthened counter-terrorism cooperation through joint military exercises, military education, and military medicine. Under the 2019-20 Plan, cooperation included special forces training, military engineering training for Uzbek personnel, air force exchanges, and initiatives to strengthen 'Uzbekistan's Karshi Aviation School.' India also assisted in establishing an 'India Room' at the Armed Forces Academy in Tashkent, reinforcing military education and institutional exchanges between the two countries (Gupta, 2024).

Uzbekistan is recognized as a major military power in Central Asia; India signed three MoUs to enhance military training and defense cooperation. Consequently, a joint military exercise named "DUSTLIK 2019" was launched to tackle cross-border terrorist activities. It was presided over by India's Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh and Uzbekistan's General Bakhodir Kurbanov (Ministry of Defence, GoI, 2019). The '1st edition' of the exercise was held in Uzbekistan in Nov 2019. This joint exercise provided significant impetus to the 'ever-growing military' and 'diplomatic ties' between the two states and reflected the strong resolve of both republics to 'counter terrorism'. The 'Joint Military Exercise', "DUSTLIK II" commenced 10 to 19 March, 2021 in 'Foreign Training Node Chaubatia, Ranikhet' (Uttarakhand). This is the '2nd Edition' of the annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies (Ministry of Defence, GoI, 2021).

The third edition of the India-Uzbekistan Joint Field Training Exercise, "DUSTLIK," took place from 22 to 31 March 2022 at the Yangiariq training ground in Uzbekistan. The exercise was designed

to strengthen interoperability and operational coordination between the two contingents through joint counter-terrorism training in a semi-urban environment. The concluding two days involved a validation exercise, in which the participating forces conducted simulated joint operations against extremist groups under a United Nations mandate (Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2022). The fourth edition of “DUSTLIK,” was held from 20 February to 5 March 2023 at the Foreign Training Node in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand. Forty-five personnel from each army participated in the exercise, which sought to strengthen military-to-military cooperation, enhance operational interaction, and promote closer institutional relations between the Indian and Uzbek armed forces (Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2023).

India and Uzbekistan have longstanding wide-ranging cooperation in the defense sector. The two countries regularly participate in a joint military exercise named “DUSTLIK”, its ‘5th edition’ was held in April 2024, with the Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Pande, participating during his visit to Uzbekistan (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026). The ‘6th edition’ of the ‘India-Uzbekistan Joint Military Exercise’ “DUSTLIK-VI” commenced at the ‘Foreign Training Node’, Aundh, Pune, and was conducted from 16 to 28 April 2025 (Ministry of Defence, GoI, 2025). India-Uzbekistan defence cooperation has expanded into defence-industrial engagement. Uzbekistan’s Defence Industry Agency participated in Aero India 2025, while the fifth meeting of the Joint Working Group on Defence Cooperation was held in New Delhi on 11 August 2025. The ninth meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism followed in Tashkent on 30 September 2025. At the regional level, the third meeting of the India-Central Asia National Security Advisers/Secretaries of Security Councils was held in Bishkek on 16 October 2025, with NSA Ajit Doval participating. The meeting addressed counter-terrorism, technological cooperation, and regional security challenges within the dialogue framework established in 2022. The Joint Working Group on Defence Cooperation, established in 2019, has remained an important mechanism for bilateral engagement, with its 6th meeting reportedly held in Uzbekistan in August 2026 (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026).

The ‘7th edition’ of the joint military exercise “Dustlik 2026” between India and Uzbekistan concluded successfully at the ‘Gurumsaray Field Training Area in Namangan’, Uzbekistan. The ‘Ministry

of Defence’ stated that this intensive two-week joint training enhanced the interoperability and joint operational capabilities of both sides in semi-mountainous terrain. The Ministry noted that the exercise progressed from tactical drills and specialized weapon training to the final validation of integrated joint missions. The concluding phase involved the detailed planning and execution of six operational stages. Troops were organized into specialized groups, including elements for reconnaissance, airborne operations, surveillance, helicopter firing, house intervention, and reserve units comprising engineer and medical detachments. The Ministry remarked that the exercise underscored the spirit of brotherhood, mutual trust, and growing defence cooperation between India and Uzbekistan (Akashvani News, 2026).

Economic cooperation

Economic cooperation focuses on pharmaceuticals, information technology, energy, agriculture, and connectivity projects. Uzbekistan is the world’s ‘12th-largest oil producer’. Major reserves of oil and natural gas are located in the ‘Ustyurt’, ‘Bukhara-Khiva’, and ‘Fergana’ regions. India’s mineral resources are far insufficient to meet its needs; consequently, dependence on other countries is inevitable. India produces 30% of its total demand, while the remaining 70% is met through imports. India’s geo-strategic interests in Uzbekistan are based on several factors, such as the demand for natural resources (Inakhiya, 2023, p. 4). India has also emerged as an important partner in capacity building, education, and healthcare, while cultural diplomacy- through films, tourism, and academic exchanges- continues to reinforce people-to-people ties.

The first systematic effort to strengthen relations with Uzbekistan was made by India’s then PM Narasimha Rao, who visited the country in 1993. During the visit, the PM offered a credit facility of ‘US\$10 million’ to Uzbekistan (Mohapatra, 2021). Uzbekistan joined India’s ‘Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation’ (ITEC) programme in 1993. It was the first country in the ‘Central Asian Republics’ to become a member of the ‘ITEC programme’ after gaining independence. The programme operates across various sectors, including journalism, the English language, management, mass communication, information technology, small and medium-sized enterprises, and study abroad (Kumar, 2019).

The relations between two countries were strengthened by the visit of the President Karimov

in May 2000. This visit provided an opportunity for both republics to share their views on (i) bilateral, (ii) regional, and (iii) international issues. Both republics share common concerns regarding the threats posed by 'religious extremism' and 'cross-border terrorism', and they emphasized the need to further strengthen 'secular and democratic ideals in international relations'. During the visit, a 'Joint Declaration on Principles of Relations' and '8 agreements' were signed. President Karimov addressed a business gathering organized by the CII and proposed cooperation in various sectors. In July 2000, the Secretary (East) visited Uzbekistan. The discussions addressed bilateral issues as well as the shared threats of religious extremism and terrorism facing India and Uzbekistan (MEA, Government of India, 2001). The sixth meeting of the India-Uzbekistan Inter-Governmental Commission was held in New Delhi on 7 March 2006. The thirteen-member Uzbek delegation was led by A. Shaykov, Minister of External Economic Relations, while Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, served as the Indian Co-Chair. The IGC concluded with the signing of a protocol outlining the programme of cooperation between the two sides (MEA, GoI, 2007, p. 43).

At the invitation of India's President the Uzbekistan's President paid a state visit to India from April 4 to 6, 2005. The visit of the Uzbek President to India continued the tradition of regular high-level exchanges in bilateral relations. India and Uzbekistan have recognised trade and tourism as important instruments for strengthening people-to-people contacts, mutual understanding, and goodwill between their societies. During the visit, the two countries signed 12 agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), further expanding the institutional framework of bilateral cooperation. Four of these were at the 'governmental level', covering cooperation in the fields of (i) education, (ii) culture, (iii) sports, and (iv) small and private enterprise. Additionally, 'Eight MoUs' were signed between both countries' institutions in the sectors of banking, IT, tourism, and education (MEA, GoI, 2005).

India's PM officially visited Uzbekistan on 'April 25-26, 2006'. During the visit, '6 MoUs' and a 'Work Plan' covering cooperation in various sectors were signed. Uzbekistan supported India's proposals for satellite-based tele-education and telemedicine connectivity and approved financial assistance for establishing the 'Uzbekistan-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre' in Tashkent. It also continued to support India's permanent

membership of an expanded 'United Nations Security Council.' The Prime Minister inaugurated the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre of Information Technology, established with a Ministry grant of Rs. 3 crore (30 million INR). The 'Uzbek President' accepted the PM's invitation to visit India (MEA, GoI, 2007, p. 43).

India-Uzbekistan relations expanded across academic, economic, sectoral, and defence domains in 2006. Five scholars from 'Jawaharlal Nehru University' participated in a conference on the 'Development of the Social Market Economy' at the 'University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent' from 23 to 25 May. The 3rd 'India Trade Exhibition in Tashkent' was inaugurated by Minister of State for Textiles Mr Elangovan on 6 October and showcased a wide range of Indian goods and services. Kirloskar Brothers Limited also donated two pump sets to the Government of Uzbekistan for installation in Samarkand. Institutional cooperation developed through working groups on mining and mineral resources and hydrocarbons, while Air Chief Marshal S. P. Tyagi's visit to Tashkent on 7-8 June reflected the continuing development of defence ties. A delegation led by Rakhmatulla R. Ruzikulov, Chairman (Minister-level) of 'Uzbek Light Industry', visited India from November 13-17, 2006 (MEA, GoI, 2007, p. 43).

The Indian energy company 'Gas Authority of India Limited' (GAIL) has been expanding its presence in Uzbekistan since 2006. Uzbekistan has agreed to initiate technical discussions with the state-owned gas company 'GAIL', enabling the Indian firm to begin natural gas exploration in this gas-rich 'Central Asian Republic'. This decision follows meetings held in Tashkent between Uzbekistan's PM Shavkat Mirziyoyev and 'India's Minister of State for Commerce', Jairam Ramesh. India has proposed assisting in the establishment of a 'training institute for gas technology' in Tashkent. This institute will be modeled after the 'Jawaharlal Nehru IT Centre' which was inaugurated in the Uzbek capital last year by PM Manmohan Singh. According to an official statement, Mr. Ramesh also conveyed or expressed India's interest in gold exploration within the country, given that India has become the 'world's largest importer of gold'. The 'Uzbek government' has agreed to consider a proposal from 'Metals and Minerals Trading Corporation' (MMTC) and the 'National Mineral Development Corporation' (NMDC) for gold exploration, provided the proposal includes value-addition investments- such as gold jewelry manufacturing- within

Uzbekistan itself. The 'MMTC' and 'NMDC' will now prepare a proposal to submit to the 'Uzbek government' within the next 30 days (The Economic Times, 2007).

India and Uzbekistan share deep historical and cultural ties. India's growing economic strength and geopolitical significance have further reinforced its desire to reconnect with 'Central Asia'. PM Modi paid an official visit to Uzbekistan in 2015. India-Uzbekistan relations have witnessed significant progress since President Mirziyoyev assumed office in December 2016. President Mirziyoyev paid a state visit to India in October 2018 and subsequently attended the 'Vibrant Gujarat Summit' in 'January 2019' as the chief guest. These high-level visits have strengthened mutual cooperation between the two countries (Gupta, 2021). Even more significantly, India and Uzbekistan took the initiative to jointly host the first 'India-Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Dialogue' in Samarkand on 'January 12, 2019'. Meanwhile, at the 2016 'Tashkent Summit', India finalized the agreements to join the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization'; this organization now provides a framework for strengthening India's ties with Eurasia. Beyond cultural and historical links, New Delhi and Tashkent share significant common interests on various issues (Roy and Roy, 2020, p. 107).

Both republics have established 'National Coordination Committees' to oversee the implementation of mutually agreed-upon 'projects and initiatives'. These committees review projects involving grant assistance and private investment proposals, while also focusing on other aspects of bilateral cooperation in sectors such as trade, investment, and education. In August 2020, the inaugural meeting of the committee dedicated to coordinating and facilitating the implementation of bilateral agreements between Uzbekistan and India was held via video conference; discussions centered on issues related to the execution of joint projects in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development (Sharma, 2025, p. 14; Umarov, 2022).

On 11 December 2020, both sides held a 'Virtual Bilateral Summit' where PM Modi and President Mirziyoyev discussed a wide range of issues important to both the countries including the early conclusion of the 'bilateral investment treaty', the 'COVID-19 pandemic', and combatting the threat of terrorism by «destroying» 'terrorist safe-havens', 'networks and funding channels'. A 'US \$448 million Line of Credit' for the development of infrastructure, 'information technology' and 'sewerage

treatment' in Uzbekistan has been extended by India. Significant among the agreements were those on digital technologies, cyber security and renewable energy. Among the issues discussed were the situation in 'Afghanistan' and its significance for stability, trade enhancement and security of the entire region (Sengupta, 2025, pp. 25-26).

So far private investment is concerned, over '280 companies of Indian origin' are operating in Uzbekistan, and numerous joint projects are underway. Investments by Indian companies span sectors such as pharmaceuticals (e.g., Cadila), the development of airport and cargo complexes (e.g., GMR), and healthcare (e.g., Ambani Specialty Hospital). India's institutional and commercial engagement with Uzbekistan has expanded across education, entrepreneurship, technology, innovation, and energy. Amity University and Sharda University have established campuses in Tashkent and Andijan, respectively, while 'iCreate' has partnered with Uzbek institutions to promote start-ups and incubator development. Indian companies such as Dev IT have also collaborated with Uzbek counterparts in technology, research, and innovation. Meanwhile, NTPC has participated in Uzbek tenders involving consultancy services for Solar PV Power Plants and gas projects (Sharma, 2025, p. 14).

India's bilateral trade with Uzbekistan stands at 'US\$ 756.60 million' (according to 2023 Uzbek data), a figure significantly below its potential; nevertheless, India ranks among Uzbekistan's 'top 10 trading partners'. Both republics' economic cooperation encompasses trade, investment, and education. India exports a range of goods and services to Uzbekistan, including mechanical equipment, pharmaceuticals, vehicle components, optical equipment, mobile phones, and frozen buffalo meat. Uzbekistan's exports to India mainly consist of vegetables and fruits, services, fertilizers, juices and extracts, and lubricants. Indian investment in Uzbekistan is estimated at around US\$325 million, covering sectors such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals, education, and residential construction. As of August 2024, 317 enterprises with Indian capital participation had been established in Uzbekistan. India's educational engagement is also growing, with Amity University in Tashkent, Sharda University in Andijan, Sambhram University in Jizzakh, and Acharya University in Bukhara establishing a presence in the country. (MEA, GoI, 2024).

Digital and economic cooperation between India and Uzbekistan has expanded significantly in recent years. The 3rd meeting of the Joint Working

Group on Digital Technologies, held virtually on November 7, 2025, addressed cooperation in information technology, education, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies. In February 2026, a ten-member Uzbek delegation led by Mr. Bobur Khodjaev of the Presidential Administration of Uzbekistan participated in the India AI Impact Summit and held parallel discussions with the Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, and Dr. M. M. Tripathi, Director General of the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology. The discussions focused on strengthening cooperation in trade, investment, AI, emerging technologies, skill development, and digital skilling. Further momentum was generated by the India-Uzbekistan Business Forum, held alongside the Tashkent International Investment Forum in June 2026, which brought together more than 200 government and industry representatives. Discussions focused on expanding trade, investment, and sectoral cooperation, including under the theme “Two Nations, One Vision for Shared Prosperity.” (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026).

Cultural Cooperation or People to People Ties

Cultural ties form a vital foundation of both countries' bilateral relations. A highly active 'Indian Cultural Centre' is in Tashkent. In addition to collaborating with numerous Uzbek organizations, the Centre organizes classes on a regular basis. The cultural ties between India and Uzbekistan reflect a strong continuity between their historical connections and contemporary engagement; the past enriches the present and fosters an environment conducive to the warm relationship shared by the both countries (Dwivedi, 2025, p. 3).

The early 1990s witnessed the strengthening of India-Uzbekistan relations through reciprocal high-level visits. Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao visited Uzbekistan in May 1993 and announced the establishment of an “India Chair” at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent and an Indian Cultural Centre in the city. Uzbek President Islam Karimov subsequently visited India in January 1994, during which the two countries signed agreements concerning economic and cultural cooperation, telecommunications and postal services, and the establishment of the Indian Cultural Centre in Tashkent. These initiatives marked an important step in developing institutional and cultural linkages between the two countries (Mavlanov,

2012, p. 145). Uzbekistan's first president Karimov was awarded with an honorary Doctor of Law by Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1994 (Timurovna, 2024, p. 3). Since the very beginning of relations between the both republics, governments have recognized the importance of cultural cooperation. The 1994 agreement on cultural cooperation was the first step towards further deepening these ties. This agreement encompassed areas such as art, cinema, television, broadcasting, science, education, sports, youth activities, the press, and publishing. Although initially valid for five years, it was subsequently extended by both sides (Koparkar, 2025, p. 35).

The 'Indian Cultural Centre' was established in 1995 (in Tashkent). The 'Indian Cultural Centre' organizes major cultural events in Tashkent to mark India's Independence Day and Republic Day. As part of its outreach initiatives, it regularly sends 'Kathak dancers' and 'Yoga students' to various provinces (Viloyats) to conduct 'Joint Cultural Programs'. It functions under the 'Indian Council for Cultural Relations of India's Ministry of Culture'. The Centre conducts regular classes in the Hindi language, Tabla, Kathak, and yoga. It also organizes events such as film screenings, dance performances, musical concerts, workshops, art exhibitions, public lectures, and seminars. Additionally, creative activities- such as quizzes on India, Indian singing sessions, Hindi poetry recitations, and essay writing- are also held (Embassy of India, Tashkent, Uzbekistan). An Indo-Uzbek IT Centre, named after the first PM Jawaharlal Nehru, was opened in Tashkent in 1998. A number of universities and educational institutions from both sides have signed memorandums, and interact regularly with one another (Koparkar, 2025, p. 36). Indian think tank 'Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses' offered '10 scholarships annually' for students of Uzbekistan. Another institute named, 'Indian Council for Cultural Relations' offered '30 scholarships annually' for the students of Uzbekistan. In the year of 2002-03, '104 candidates', in 2003-04, '109 candidates' and in 2004-05, '100 candidates' participated in the 'ITEC program's' training by 'External Ministry of Affairs of India' (Kumar, 2019). The Indian Cultural Centre in Uzbekistan was renamed as the 'Lal Bahadur Shastri Centre for Indian Culture' (LBSCIC) in March 2005 (Embassy of India, Tashkent, Uzbekistan).

At the invitation of India's President, the Uzbek President paid a 'State Visit to India' from '4-6 April 2005'. The Uzbek President's visit to India continued the practice of regular high-level exchanges bilaterally and symbolized their longstanding histori-

cal ties and deep cultural affinity (MEA, GoI, 2005). In response to the Uzbekistan president's visits to India, the India's PM made an official visit to Uzbekistan on '25-26 April 2006'. During the visit, the two sides held detailed discussions on further strengthening bilateral relations in the political, scientific and technical, trade and economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres, along with on regional and international issues of mutual interest (MEA, GoI, 2007, p. 43). A 'Center of Indology' named after 'Mahatma Gandhi' was established at the 'Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies' with a grant from the Ministry (MEAF, GoI, 2007, p. 43).

Bilateral relations between the two countries received a significant boost after 2015, particularly following PM Narendra Modi's visit to Uzbekistan. The leadership from both sides gave a boost leading to expansion of cooperation in various fields, including culture and people-to-people relations. The 'Cultural Exchange Programme' for the year 2021-25 was signed by the government of India and government Uzbekistan in 2021. In addition, governments have brought several new initiatives to promote cultural cooperation (Koparkar, 2025, p. 35). The knowledge and study of the Uzbek language remain limited in India, despite the presence of thousands of common words between Uzbek and Indian languages. The Jamia Millia Islamia University has an Uzbek language centre, which has conducted a graduation course of Uzbek for the last many years. In 2021, centres for Uzbek language were also inaugurated at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University, offering a one-year certificate course in Uzbek language. Recently, 'Amity University' and 'Sharda University' have opened their campuses in 'Tashkent' and 'Andijan' respectively (Koparkar, 2025, p. 36). Uzbek singers like Kakhramon Gulomjanov have earned fame by signing Indian songs in concerts organized under his band, Havas Guruhi Hindi broadcasting on the 'Uzbek Radio' completed 60 years in 2022. The 'Namaste Hindiston' programme went on for years on the radio, popularizing Indian culture, festivals, and songs. Indian movies are regularly translated in Uzbek language and are shown in cinema halls and television (Koparkar, 2025, p. 37).

A number of Uzbek students come to India for higher education every year; some of whom receive the government of India scholarships. Uzbekistan has also been a partner in the 'Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation' (ITEC) programme since 1993. As many as 2500 Uzbek students have received training in IT, English language, and mass

media under ITEC fellowships (Koparkar, 2025, p. 36). Likewise, the number of Indian medical students has risen in recent years. In 2022, Uzbekistan provided 2000 seats in its medical colleges for Indian students who had to halt their medical education in the wake of the Ukraine Crisis (Business Standard, 2022).

India's educational and cultural engagement with Uzbekistan has expanded through the establishment of India Study Centres at 15 universities under the "Aid to Uzbekistan" initiative. The ICCR has also introduced two short-term Chairs- Economics at Samarkand State University and Hindi at Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies. Selected centres have received IT equipment as well as books, musical instruments, traditional Indian attire, and cultural artefacts. Hindi-language cooperation has further strengthened cultural exchanges. In January 2023, four Uzbek Hindi scholars participated in the World Hindi Conference in Nadi, Fiji, where Nilufar Khodjaeva of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies received the "Hindi Samman Award" from India's External Affairs Minister. Such initiatives have contributed to the development of academic, linguistic, and cultural ties between India and Uzbekistan. For the 2024-2025 period, more than '100 candidates' from Uzbekistan were selected under 'ITEC' programs (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026). Indian cinema has maintained a strong cultural presence in Uzbekistan since the era of Raj Kapoor, with Indian films, artists, and music enjoying enduring popularity. This cultural affinity has been reinforced through recent film initiatives. A five-day "Indian Cinema Week" was held from December 17 to 21, 2024, to mark Raj Kapoor's birth centenary. Subsequently, the "Sashakt Nari- Celebrating Womanhood" film festival was organized from March 13 to 16, 2025, with its second edition held from March 12 to 15, 2026. The festivals featured women-centric films from Hindi and regional Indian cinema, contributing to cultural exchange and strengthening people-to-people ties between the two countries (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026).

Multilateral frameworks

Moreover, cooperation within multilateral frameworks, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), highlights shared concerns regarding terrorism, regional security, and sustainable development. Contemporary engagements reflect a pragmatic partnership grounded in historical goodwill and aligned with evolving regional and global

dynamics. On June 11, 2010, the first President Kariyov, met with 'India's External Affairs Minister' S.M. Krishna, who had participated as an observer country in the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' summit in Tashkent (Doniyev, 2022, p. 49).

The political climate in Central Asia appears conducive to regional cooperation. This is reflected in the policies of Uzbekistan's new President, Mirziyoyev, who has focused on fostering good-neighborly relations and strengthening regional cooperation by adopting a flexible approach to resolving long-standing water and border disputes with his 'Central Asian' neighbors (Roy & Roy, 2020, p. 114). In his 'landmark speech at the 2017 UN General Assembly', President Mirziyoyev emphasized the 'priority of Central Asia in Uzbekistan's foreign policy, and the need to make the region peaceful and economically prosperous' (The Tashkent Times, 2020). Within this framework, the scope and significance of the 'SCO' (of which Uzbekistan is a key member) have expanded manifold, particularly following the addition of 'India' and 'Pakistan' as new members. The organization has evolved beyond merely serving as a mechanism for resolving border disputes; it now actively addresses 'security challenges' and fosters 'economic cooperation' and 'connectivity' among member states (Roy & Roy, 2020, p. 114).

India and Uzbekistan maintain active engagement through multilateral and regional platforms, including the UN, SCO, BRICS, and G20. Their parliamentary cooperation was highlighted in July 2024 when Tanzila Narbaeva, Chairperson of the Uzbek Senate, met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on the sidelines of the 10th BRICS Parliamentary Forum in St. Petersburg. Bilateral engagement also takes place through the India-Central Asia framework, particularly the India-Central Asia Summit, India-Central Asia Dialogue at the Foreign Ministers' level, Joint Working Group on Afghanistan, and Central Asia Business Council. Uzbekistan has also participated in the Voice of Global South Summit, including two ministerial sessions on trade and environment at its 3rd edition in August 2024. In April 2025, an Indian parliamentary delegation led by Om Birla participated in the 150th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Tashkent (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026).

Uzbekistan participated as a BRICS partner country in the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in New Delhi in May 2026, represented by Bahromjon Alov, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. An interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also held during the visit. Subsequently,

on 27 May 2026, India and Uzbekistan signed a Bilateral Market Access Protocol in the context of Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), further institutionalising bilateral trade cooperation (Embassy of India Tashkent, 2026).

Challenges and Future Prospects/Emerging Opportunities

Despite the steady expansion of relations, several challenges continue to constrain the full potential of bilateral cooperation. The most significant challenge is 'geographical distance and the absence of direct land connectivity', which increases transportation costs and limits the growth of trade and investment. The relatively 'low volume and narrow composition of bilateral trade' also indicate the need for 'greater economic diversification' and 'stronger business-to-business linkages'. In addition, India faces growing 'strategic and economic competition' from major powers including- China, Russia, Turkey, and other external actors in 'Central Asia'.

Despite existing challenges, both relations offer significant opportunities for deeper and more diversified cooperation. Economic and trade cooperation represents one of the most promising areas, particularly in- (i) pharmaceuticals, (ii) healthcare, (iii) agriculture, (iv) textiles, (v) information technology, (vi) digital services, and (vii) renewable energy. India's expertise in pharmaceuticals, IT, education, and healthcare can complement Uzbekistan's growing economy and development priorities. The growing importance of various fields such as- education, tourism, culture, yoga, cinema, and people-to-people exchanges provides further scope for strengthening 'India's Soft-power' engagement with Uzbekistan. The cooperation in renewable energy, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies could also create new areas of strategic partnership. By combining their historical goodwill with new economic, technological, and strategic initiatives, Uzbekistan and India can transform their relationship into a more comprehensive and future-oriented partnership. Ultimately, Uzbekistan is likely to remain an important partner in India's Central Asian engagement, while India can contribute to Uzbekistan's efforts to diversify its external partnerships and expand its links with South Asia.

Results and discussion

The findings indicate that Uzbekistan-India relations have evolved from long-standing historical

and cultural ties into a contemporary multifaceted partnership. Historical connections rooted in trade, intellectual exchange, the Mughal legacy, and cultural interaction continue to serve as a robust foundation for cooperation between the two countries. In contemporary times, defense cooperation encompassing military exercises, training, and counter-terrorism efforts has gained strategic significance, while economic ties have expanded across sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, textiles, information technology, and healthcare. Cultural cooperation, through cinema, education, yoga, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges remains a vital channel for fostering mutual goodwill. Multilateral forums, particularly the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have further enhanced opportunities for collaboration on regional security, connectivity, and development. However, the findings also reveal that economic and commercial ties remain below their full potential, primarily due to geographical barriers, limited connectivity, transportation costs, and low private-sector participation.

Conclusion

The relations between India and Uzbekistan represent a distinctive combination of historical civilizational connections and emerging contemporary strate-

gic interests. India-Uzbekistan relations are grounded in longstanding exchanges in trade, culture, intellectual traditions, and people-to-people contacts. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations after Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, these historical ties gradually developed into a multidimensional partnership. Today, bilateral cooperation encompasses defence and security, trade and investment, connectivity, education, healthcare, and multilateral engagement, alongside traditional political and cultural cooperation. The defence cooperation, particularly 'joint exercises' and 'counter-terrorism efforts', has strengthened mutual strategic understanding, while cultural exchanges and shared historical heritage continue to provide an important foundation for bilateral relations. Nevertheless, the relationship faces several constraints, including- (i) geographical distance, (ii) limited connectivity, (iii) relatively low trade volumes, (iv) logistical difficulties, and (v) increasing competition among major external powers in Central Asia. Addressing these challenges requires- (i) greater economic engagement, (ii) improved connectivity, (iii) stronger private-sector participation, and (iv) sustained institutional dialogue. At the same time, opportunities in pharmaceuticals, digital technology, renewable energy, education, healthcare, tourism, and regional connectivity provide considerable scope for further cooperation.

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Previously sent June 15, 2026.

Re-registered August 8, 2026.

Accepted September 3, 2026.