

## General Studies – 2; Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations

### India-Afghanistan Connectivity

#### 1) Introduction

- Economic development is an important factor in ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan
- India has remained actively engaged in Afghanistan's economic and infrastructural development since 2001 by contributing over \$2 billion in aid
- India-Afghanistan air corridor was inaugurated in June 2017.

#### 2) Benefits of Air Freight Corridor

- The air corridor aims to enhance the annual volume of trade between the two countries, which currently stands at around \$700 million.
- Air Freight Corridor will provide Afghanistan, a landlocked country, greater access to markets in India
- It will allow Afghan businessmen to leverage India's economic growth and trade networks for its benefit.
- It would enable Afghan farmers quick and direct access to the Indian markets for their perishable produce.

#### 3) Connectivity Initiatives by India

- Pakistan has unilaterally initiated border closures at regular intervals to economically pressure Afghanistan.
- India has been closely working with Afghanistan to create alternate and reliable access routes for the landlocked country.
- Presently, there are four to five flights operating daily between Afghanistan and India, bringing nearly 1,000 Afghans, many of them for medical treatment in Indian hospitals.
- India had announced to allow Afghan Trucks to enter the Indian Territory through Attari land Checkpost for offloading and loading goods from and to Afghanistan.
- India is also cooperating with Afghanistan and Iran for development of the Chabahar Port.
- India is also financing the Zaranj-Delaram Highway in Afghanistan, which connects the Garland Highway, linked to all Afghan cities, to Chabahar and provides Afghanistan stable access to regional markets.
- All such connectivity efforts signal India's desire to actively participate in regional economic development
- India's intention to create its own connectivity network appears to be a strategy to counterbalance the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

#### 4) Concerns / Challenges

- Fruit exporters complaining that procedural delays, particularly a shortage of cargo planes, are causing them major losses.
- Lack of adequate cold storage facilities at the airport.
- The initiative has been hit by logistical problems leaving traders in Afghanistan with tonnes of perishable produce
- Tenders by India Ports Global Limited to develop berths as well as the railway line connecting Chabahar to the Afghan border at Zahedan continue to be delayed.

- Insufficient follow-through on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline
- The challenge to developing the Chabahar Port is the uncertainty among financiers and terminal operators because of mixed signals from the Trump administration towards Iran.
- Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) of 2010, has constantly run into issues because of tensions between India and Pakistan.

### 5) **Way Forward**

- India's plans for the Chabahar port in Iran and the trilateral agreement (India, Afghanistan and Iran) to develop transit trade also need close attention.
- Both India and the US should leverage their growing strategic convergence to bolster Afghanistan's economic capacity and make them self-reliant.
- It is crucial that India match its diplomatic outreach with concrete efforts to deepen long-term engagement on connectivity
- Gradually increase the flights in the India-Afghanistan air corridor
- India must also establish secure connectivity and trade with other countries that lie to its west.

### 6) **Conclusion**

- Connectivity and economic integration projects promote overall growth, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan
- India remains committed to assist Afghanistan in all possible ways in its political, security and economic transitions to ensure emergence of a sovereign, united, democratic, pluralistic, stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

