India - Kazakhstan Relations

Relations between India and Kazakhstan go back to several centuries before Christ, when members of the Saka tribes from Southern Kazakhstan travelled and got assimilated into India. There has been a constant exchange of ideas between the two countries with Buddhism travelling from India to Central Asia and Sufism from Central Asia to India. In modern times, first PM of India Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru accompanied by Indira Gandhi visited Almaty in 1955.

Diplomatic relations with independent Kazakhstan were established in February 1992 during the first visit of President Nazarbayev to India. This was followed by the visit of Prime Minister of India Shri Narsimha Rao in 1993 which gave impetus to bilateral relations. President Nazarbayev visited India in 1992, 1993 (transit), 1996, 2002 and 2009. In January 2009, he was the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations. Vice-Presidents of India Shri K.R. Narayanan and Shri Hamid Ansari visited Kazakhstan in 1996 and 2008 respectively. Prime Ministers Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Kazakhstan in June 2002 and April 2011. These high level visits have laid a solid foundation for close and friendly bilateral relations between the two countries.

A Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership was adopted during the visit of President Nazarbayev in January 2009, which encompasses comprehensive cooperation in political, commercial, defence, technical, educational and cultural spheres.

The India-Kazakhstan Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) established in 1993 has been the main institutional mechanism in developing bilateral trade, economic, scientific, technological, industrial and cultural cooperation. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on the Indian side and Ministry of Energy on the Kazakh side are the nodal agencies with respective Ministers as the Co-Chairs. The 12th IGC meeting was held in New Delhi in June 2015. Joint Working Groups and Sub-Committees have been established in the areas of Counter Terrorism, Trade & Economic Cooperation, Information Technology, Hydrocarbons and Textiles. A new Joint Working Group on Connectivity was established recently during the 12th IGC meeting in New Delhi.

Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers are held frequently to discuss the entire range of bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. The last (6th FOC) was held in Astana in March 2015.

India and Kazakhstan actively cooperate under the aegis of Multilateral Fora including CICA, SCO and the UN organizations. India has been a consistent supporter of Kazakhstan’s initiative to convene Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and is actively participating in the process. Kazakhstan is supportive of India’s permanent membership to UNSC. Kazakhstan had
withdrawn its candidature for non-permanent membership of UNSC for the period 2011-2012 in India’s favour. India supports Kazakhstan’s candidature for non-permanent membership of UNSC for 2017-18. Kazakhstan strongly condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and supports comprehensive convention on countering international terrorism. It strongly condemned the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

Kazakhstan is India's largest trading partner in Central Asia. Bilateral trade during 2014-15 was US$ 952.26 million. The exports from India to Kazakhstan amounted to US$ 250.59 and exports from Kazakhstan to India were US$ 701.67. Major products exported to Kazakhstan are pharmaceuticals and medical products, Tea, telephone equipment, tobacco and construction machinery. Major products imported by India are oil, uranium, asbestos and titanium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Export</td>
<td>172.16</td>
<td>244.39</td>
<td>286.23</td>
<td>261.51</td>
<td>250.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>138.42</td>
<td>191.86</td>
<td>139.99</td>
<td>656.33</td>
<td>701.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Trade</td>
<td>310.59</td>
<td>436.25</td>
<td>426.22</td>
<td>917.84</td>
<td>952.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source – Ministry of Commerce, New Delhi)

According to Kazakh statistics, total foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan from India is USD 267.1 million. Indian investments are in areas such as oil and gas, banking, engineering, restaurants, tea packaging, pharmaceutical trading, mining, steel, travel agency, trading and services. Arcelor Mittal Temirtau, SUN Group, KazStroyService KEC Ltd., Punjab National Bank and ONGC Videsh Limited are the major Indian owned companies/PSUs operating in Kazakhstan. The total investment of Kazakh companies in India is USD 126.8 million. Kazakh investments are mainly in oil and gas sector and engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contracts.

A fresh impetus to bilateral relations was given during the visit of President Nazarbayev to India in January 2009, when an MoU between NPCIL and Kazatomprom envisaging cooperation between the two countries, including supply of uranium to India, was signed. An Agreement between ONGC Videsh Limited and KazMunaiGaz on the purchase of 25% stake in the Satpayev Oil Block in the Caspian Sea was signed in Astana in April 2011 during the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

In the cultural sphere, the bilateral relations are deep rooted, vibrant and dynamic. India and Kazakhstan have a natural affinity with each other as both are multiethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious secular States. The friendly relations with former Soviet Union positively influenced the attitudes of Kazakh people towards Indian culture, which continues to manifest in the popularity of yoga, Indian films, dance and music in Kazakhstan. In last few years, Indian TV serials have also become popular in Kazakhstan.
Indian Cultural Centre in Astana is engaged in various cultural activities, including conducting of yoga and dance classes; celebration of Indian festivals; organizing of cultural performances; screening of Indian films and documentaries; organizing performances by visiting Indian cultural troupes in Kazakhstan and Kazakh cultural troupes in India; disbursement of ICCR scholarships; and organizing visits under Academic Visitors Programme.

India trains specialists and scholars from Kazakhstan in various fields under ITEC program sponsored by Ministry of External Affairs and under the ICCR Scholarship programmes for international students. Since 1992, more than 900 specialists have undergone training under ITEC programme and more than 200 students have studied in India under ICCR programme.

The regular contacts between academic and strategic communities has played a significant role in strengthening cooperation between India and Kazakhstan. The academic and educational institutions in both countries have been maintaining active and vibrant exchanges and providing important inputs to policy makers in both the countries to identify new promising areas of cooperation.

India and Kazakhstan have an agreement on visa free entry for Diplomatic and Official Passport holders. Ordinary passport holders require visa, which has to be applied for in advance by the local sponsors for obtaining visa clearance from Consular Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The visa is issued at Embassy in New Delhi usually within one week from the date of receipt of clearance.

There are about 4200 NRIs/PIOs in Kazakhstan. Most of them are in the private sector (oil exploration, downstream industries, steel and IT) and business (tea, pharmaceuticals etc). There are about 700 Indian students studying in three medical universities in Almaty, Karaganda and Semey.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Astana website: 
http://indembastana.in/
Embassy of India, Astana Facebook: 
www.facebook.com/EmbassyOfIndiaKazakhstan
Embassy of India, Astana Twitter account: 
@indembastana
Embassy of India Newsletter: 

*****

June 2015