

# **UZBEKISTAN'S ROLE IN INTER AND INTRA-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY**

---

Prof. Shabir Ahmad Khan

Director

Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia) University of  
Peshawar

---

# INTRODUCTION

- This particular work briefly discusses the exceptional economic performance of Uzbekistan since independence and thereafter looks into the Republic's role in regional and trans-regional integration and connectivity necessitated by its economic growth and geography.
- The work is qualitative in nature, based on empirical research as the author did his Master in Economic from Tashkent State Economic University in 1994-1996
- Did PhD on Uzbekistan's Agricultural Organization and Management reference to Cotton from ASC, UoP in 2007
- Visited Tashkent in 2005-06 for field study, visited in 2019 for Parliamentary elections. In July, 2021 visited for International Conference on Central and South Asian Connectivity, September 2021 for Amir Temur Conference, October 2021 for Presidential elections. So Tashkent has grown tremendously before my eyes. Secondary sources have also been used.

# UZBEKISTAN'S EXCEPTIONAL ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

- Since 1991, Uzbekistan has remained an exception with in Central Asian region for its economic transformation, growth and development. During the multi-dimensional transitions of the 1990s, Uzbekistan's economic performance was best amongst the dozens of transitional economies. The economic contraction was least in comparison to all other former Soviet states including Central Asian Republics (CARs).
- Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian Republic to turn the economic growth positive in 1995 and to achieve the pre-independence (1989) growth level by the year 2000 while Kazakhstan achieved it a year later by 2001. Uzbekistan adopted a gradual reform policy termed as "Uzbek Model" by prioritizing economy over politics with a prudent guiding role of the state. Since then Uzbekistan has never looked back and today inter-city bullet trains are operational.

## CONTINUED

- The economy of Uzbekistan has grown at an average rate of 7.2 percent during the last fifteen years (2005-2020) which is quite impressive. Despite the Pandemic, Uzbek economy has achieved tremendous economic growth i.e. 16.4% during 2017-2020.
- This tremendous growth has been translated into infrastructural development across the country generating further economic activity and productivity.
- Uzbekistan has been executing mega projects such as airports, highways, railways and infrastructure for free economic zones and transport and logistic centers to better fit in the international transportation system.

# EURASIAN INTEGRATION

- The 21st century can be termed as Eurasian Century as the Eurasian landmass has been rapidly integrating.
- Two factors are instrumental in realizing Halfords Mackinder's Heartland Theory in the 21st Century as opposed to the last century.
- First the technological developments and secondly the synergies, understanding and cooperation developed between the Eurasian states particularly between Russia and China surrounding almost entire Eurasian Heartland.
- The Eurasian integration will transfer huge portion of world trade to trans-continental trade corridors making Central Asia a transit bridge between Asian, African and European continents.

## CONTINUED

- The Eurasian heartland i.e. Central Asia as a result is being connected in all directions.
- The major powers like Russia, China, USA and European Union all have framed their own integration plans i.e. Eurasian Union, BRI, New Silk Road and the relatively older TRACECA (Transport Corridor-Europe-Caucasia-Asia) respectively.
- Similarly there are bilateral and multilateral trans-regional integration arrangements along with connectivity plans of regional and international organizations such as ECO, SCO and CAREC.
- The regional and sub-regional organizations need to coordinate their policies for physical infrastructure development.

# UZBEKISTAN'S ROLE IN INTER AND INTRA-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

- Uzbekistan after consolidating its nation and state hood with strong, diversified and dynamic economy looking beyond the borders to capitalize on its geographical location in the heart of Central Asia in order to enhance regional and trans-regional connectivity in this era of Eurasian Integration.
- Uzbekistan occupies the Centre of Eurasian Heartland having borders with all CARs including Afghanistan.
- The Government of Uzbekistan has embarked on a fundamentally changed foreign policy with a focus on inter and intra-regional cooperation within Central Asia and with South Asia by the promotion of peace and development in Afghanistan.
- Uzbekistan currently participating and implementing the policy of (TRACECA) Inter-Governmental Commission 2026 Strategy through Master and Action Plan 2018-2020. Uzbekistan welcome the proposals of other partner countries to enhance trans-regional transportation corridors under the TRACECA.

## CONTINUED

- Uzbekistan has been maintaining balance in its relations with major powers like Russia, China, USA and Europe to benefit from their investment, trade and transfer of technologies.
- The new initiatives undertaken by President Mirziyoyev have been focusing on augmenting foreign trade and economic relations, amicably resolving border and water issues in Central Asia and facilitating smooth border crossings for enhanced trans-regional trade and economic connectivity.
- The Consultative Forum has been revived with the efforts of Shavkat Mirziyoyev amongst the leaders of CARs which is instrumental in resolving water and border issues in consultation and mutual understanding.

## CONTINUED

- The enhanced cooperation in Central Asia serves two pragmatic interests and objectives for the region.
- First Central Asia will be viewed as a single large market with smooth border crossing by the investors and traders.
- Secondly CARs will maximally benefit from the integration plans of the major powers.
- It is through regional cooperation that the natural wealth of the region can be translated into inclusive growth and development.
- Uzbekistan also aims to address the region-wide security issues in jointly coordinated manner to pave the way for sustainable peace and development as both are imperative and neither can be achieved without the other.

## CONTINUED

- Uzbekistan's role and efforts in organizing crucial international forums for promoting inter and intra-regional connectivity has become the voice of all regional states and enjoy region-wide support.
- The grand international conference for Central and South Asia connectivity in Tashkent in July, 2021 has ushered a new era of reviving the centuries old trade and cultural links between the two regions.
- Uzbekistan has concrete plans to link Peshawar and Termiz through the development of trans-Afghan railways and highways.
- It will naturally transform into trade and economic corridor between Central and South Asia as Peshawar serve as a gateway to South Asia while Termiz serve as gateway to Central Asia.

## CONTINUED

- The Trans-Afghan Railway Project has been warmly supported and pursued by Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan as the three countries have already requested the international financial organizations to help in financing.
- Central and South Asia can capitalize on their comparative advantages in terms of human and natural resources by enhancing connectivity via Afghanistan.
- The development strategies of trade and transport corridor between Central and South Asia shall be devised and frame by the traders, regional commerce ministries, local companies and banks, farmers and local entrepreneurs instead of military and strategic planners sitting thousands miles away.

## CONTINUED

- Uzbekistan as a member of SCO, ECO, and CAREC and as observer in Eurasian Union and important partner in BRI playing critical role in materializing the connectivity plans in the form of trans-regional highways, railways and pipelines.
- In this context Tashkent pursuing transport infrastructure development such as Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman corridor and Trans-Afghan corridor including the development of Termiz-Peshawar rail and road link.
- This will help to develop North-South and East-West Corridors complementing the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, Central Eurasian Corridor and other road projects of ECO and CAREC passing through Uzbekistan strengthening overall transit potential of the Central Asian region.

## CONTINUED

- Uzbekistan has prioritized the development of International Transport Corridor 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.
- The Republic is also an important partner in BRI and links Central Eurasian Corridor with the ports of Pakistan and Iran. The development of Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China railway line under the BRI is mutually beneficial in creating trans-regional connectivity.

## CONTINUED

- Construction of new highways such as the Andijan-Osh-Irkeshtam-Kashgar corridor and setting up a railway line along this route will open new prospective transportation corridor under the BRI framework.
- Tashkent links the Asian Highway 7 (AH 7) from Yekaterinburg in Russia via Afghanistan to the ports on Arabian Sea. AH 7 starts from Yekaterinburg in Russia crosses Tashkent, Kabul and reaches Gwadar via Chaman and Kandahar.
- AH7 can also take a shape of North-South Corridor to South Asia, Arabian Sea and beyond.
- The China-Central Asia Pipeline system is yet another example of regional cooperation which has established an energy corridor intra-regionally.

# UZBEKISTAN-PAKISTAN CONNECTIVITY



- With the changes in regional geo-political configuration, Pakistan has reframed its foreign policy with a focus on geo-economics. Geo-economics is a synonym for regional connectivity particularly in the direction of Central Asia.
- There is an unprecedented warmth and promotion in Pak-Uzbek overall bilateral relations during the last few years in Particular.
- Two most important factors that induce Pakistan and Uzbekistan to enhance connectivity are their significant geographical locations in respective regions and secondly ongoing integration processes in the region.
- For Pakistan connectivity with Uzbekistan means connectivity with all other CARs. Pakistan is naturally facing towards Central Asia and considers itself part of the process of regionalism reinvigorated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Central Asia.

## CONTINUED

- Improving physical connectivity infrastructure and harmonizing, coordinating policies via Afghanistan is imperative for meaning-full cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan in the short term.
- Both the countries may soon declare Termiz and Peshawar as sister cities.
- This status will help increasing cultural, social, educational, trade and economic relations between the two cities.
- One of the basic aims of connectivity must be to develop the transport and logistic corridors between Pakistan and Uzbekistan via Afghanistan through Railways and Highways and these will naturally transform into economic corridors due to agglomeration effects. A production network can be developed in the fields of textile, leather, automobiles, food processing and pharmaceuticals by both the countries. The realization of the proposed railway line linking Termiz with Peshawar via Kabul will fundamentally change the regional landscape in terms of connectivity.

# Thank You