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India-Central Asia Summit 2022: From Symbol to Substance

Ramakrushna Pradhan*

The first India-Central Asia Summit held in New Delhi on 27th January 2022 has established a new milestone in India-Central Asia relations. Although the Summit was organised in a virtual format, the initiative proved to be symbolic of the importance India attaches to its strategic neighbours in Central Asia for establishing a comprehensive and enduring partnership with them. As India considers the Central Asian Republics as 'central' to its vision of an integrated, stable and extended neighbourhood, the inaugural India-Central Asia Summit, which also coincided with 30 years of their diplomatic relationship, would help New Delhi to develop strategies for a better, stronger and substantive relationship between the two sides. In this milieu, this article attempts to delineate how this Summit enables the transformation of India's symbolic and historical ties into a substantive, visionary and strategic partnership through increasing trade, economic and connectivity potentials.

Central Asia is a buffer between two nuclear powers – the Russian Federation and China. Major geopolitical massifs – the Eurasian, Islamic, Chinese, and Indian – intersect here. Central Asia is also the geographical centre of Asia, where four ancient civilizations – Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism – meet. The region also critically links to the security of almost all the countries of the world and offers immense opportunities to regional and extra-regional players. A vivid reflection of history tells us about the centuries-old close civilizational, cultural, trade and people-to-people linkage shared between India and Central Asia. Events in Central Asia have shaped a good portion of India's political history. The region used to be a staging ground for invasions into India. Central Asian dynamics vis-à-vis India's strategic thought has been mentioned in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Central Asia was also a bridge for promoting Indian commerce and culture across Asia.

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