

Opening Remarks

by

Ambassador Nalin Surie
Director General
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at the
Inaugural Session of the
Fourth 'India-Central Asia Dialogue'

at
Sapru House, New Delhi
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A very warm welcome to Sapru House to all the participants to the Fourth India-Central Asia Dialogue. I trust that our participants from the Central Asian Republics will feel at home in New Delhi as much as we do when we visit your beautiful countries. This is not surprising since ours is a civilisational relationship with shared ideas, values, customs and traditions. We resumed this traditional discourse in a direct manner following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union in December 1991.

Since their independence almost 25 years ago, the Central Asian Republics have once again found themselves at the strategic centre of Eurasia and are positioned to be a land bridge between Asia and Europe. Your importance for India is self evident.



Ambassador Nalin Surie, Director General, ICWA delivering Opening Remarks at the Inaugural Session.

India was amongst the first country's to establish full diplomatic relations with the Central Asian Republics following their independence in December 1991. We also had the privilege of receiving your Heads of State soon after your independence. This was a reflection of the mutual importance that we attach to our relations. This fact was further underlined by Prime Minister Modi when he visited all your countries in July last year. That visit was a reflection of our policy approach that Central Asia is a part of India's extended hinterland and near neighbourhood; a region with which we need to strengthen our strategic contacts, economic & cultural interaction and regional collaboration.

Both our regions are confronted with complex challenges and common problems. These include issues of connectivity, terrorism, socio-economic development, the situation in Afghanistan and religious extremism. Together we can better confront these challenges for the benefit of our peoples and countries. This ongoing dialogue is one small step in moving forward towards identifying common approaches and areas of cooperation.

India's collaboration with the countries of Central Asia is not part of a balance of power approach. It is the outcome of an approach based on mutual benefit and obvious complementarities. Our effort must be to jointly dismantle bottlenecks to future growth and prosperity.

We have before us a full agenda and an impressive list of speakers. I am confident that at the end of our deliberations, we will come up with a meaningful set of proposals for enhancing mutually beneficial cooperation among our countries. India's forthcoming membership of the SCO, our on-going negotiations with the Eurasian Economic Union and our role in Afghanistan will no doubt help in this process.

This Dialogue has been put together by my colleague Deputy Director General, Ajaneesh Kumar and Dr. Athar Zafar, Research Fellow with the help of other colleagues from the Research Faculty several of whom are presenting papers during our deliberations. To the Ministry of External Affairs and in particular, Joint Secretary (Eurasia), G.V.Srinivas our appreciation for requesting the ICWA to arrange this important meeting.

Most of all, my gratitude to Ambassador Sujata Mehta, Secretary (West), for agreeing to deliver the Keynote address at our Dialogue today. She has extensive experience in the region and will in her address undoubtedly provide us a clear understanding of India's approach and commitment to the countries of Central Asia. Once again I thank you all for your presence here today. It will interest you to know that this Dialogue also includes an innovative webinar format enabling participants from all five Central Asian Republics and other stakeholders to participate through the web. They will be able to make interventions and ask questions during the five working sessions.

I now have great pleasure in inviting Ambassador Sujata Mehta to deliver the Keynote address.
