

Respected

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4. Prof. Sucha Singh Gill,
5. Sh. Pinak Ranjan Chakarvarti

- First of all, let me thank the organizers of this National Seminar on "India and Central Asia: Perspectives on Bilateral and Regional Cooperation".
- The significance and importance of this seminar is greatly enhanced by the fact that His Excellency, the Vice President Sahib has personally chosen to inaugurate the event.
- H.E. Janab Mohammad Ansari Sahib has keen interest in Central Asian Countries and his presence in this seminar would go a long way in strengthening economic, social, commercial and cultural ties between India and Central Asian nations.
- At the same time, this theme is of special interest to Punjab as the State is land locked and the only alternative available for its economic and commercial growth is by way of opening its trade and commerce through land route.

BACKGROUND OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL TIES AMONG PUNJABIS AND THESE REGIONS

- Punjab has had a long history and tradition of ties with people from these Central Asian Countries.
- But when geographical boundaries were re-drawn, these ties came to a stop.

- The strained political relations between India and Pakistan after 1947 have adversely affected economic interests of both the countries.
- However now, it is heartening that relations between India and Pakistan are moving in a constructive direction. Naturally, Punjabis are the happiest people over this for every reason, cultural, religious and economic.

Important Issues:

- Punjab is rich in agricultural know-how, enterprise and human resource. But it has immense pressure on its natural resources, as land is scarce and fragmented.
- On the contrary, in central Asian Countries, land is vast and fertile but uncultivated. They have more farms and fewer farmers, whereas we have more farmers but smaller land holdings.
- This automatically creates a situation in which Punjabi farmers can use their talents on the lands in these countries for mutual benefit.
- Further for Indian exports from agriculture and industry sectors to these countries, Punjab has a huge locational advantage.
- On our side, we will see expansion in agricultural infrastructure , such a cold chains, warehousing etc. near the border
- Amritsar will regain its importance as a prime International Commercial Centre.
- Punjab can also become a hub for religious, cultural and medical tourism for people from these Central Asian countries.

- But there are issues and challenges that need to be addressed.
- Most of these issues have three dimensions:
1. Security 2. VISA Norms and 3. Trade and Commerce Laws prevailing in these countries.
- As for as security angle is concerned, governments of these countries and the Indian government can interact for improving the security scenario for prospective investors.
- VISA Norms with these countries also need to be relaxed. I have been told that strict rules, regulations and procedures complicate matters both for tourism and trade.
- Thirdly, there is the issue of legal security for investments and for guarantees for long term ownership rights, especially in lands.
- This issue also needs to be settled.
- At present, there are certain problems regarding permission of trade with private entrepreneurs from these countries, which also needs to be resolved.
- Before I close, I would like to request for the participants to give your learned and valuable suggestions on the steps which the state government of Punjab can take to help in facilitating greater flow in trade, commerce and cultural ties.
- I once again thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak on an issue which of immense interest to our country, and more especially to us in Punjab.

Thank you.