

# AFGHANISTAN-TURKMENISTAN AND INDIA INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS AND CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC RELATIONS

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## Abstract

*This article explores the intricate infrastructure projects and cross-border economic relations among Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and India. It highlights key initiatives such as (TAPI) gas pipeline, electricity supply projects, and various road connectivity efforts. These projects aim to enhance energy security, foster trade, and promote regional cooperation. Ultimately, it argues that while significant progress has been made, that require collaborative efforts among the involved nations to realize the full potential of their economic ties.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, India, infrastructure projects, TAPI pipeline, cross-border economic relations, energy, trade, regional cooperation, geopolitical dynamics.

## INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical landscape of South and Central Asia is increasingly shaped by infrastructure development and economic cooperation. Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and India are three key players in this dynamic, with various projects aimed at enhancing connectivity and fostering economic growth. This article explores the significant infrastructure projects between these nations and the broader implications for cross-border economic relations.

### AFGHANISTAN-TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan relations are anchored in historical ties, economic cooperation, and regional security concerns. Since gaining independence in the early 1990s, Turkmenistan has viewed Afghanistan as a crucial neighbor for its geopolitical strategy, particularly in diversifying its energy exports. One of the most significant initiatives is the TAPI gas pipeline project, aimed at transporting Turkmen natural gas to South Asian markets (India through Afghanistan), which underscores the economic interdependence between the two nations (Shikhmuradov, 2019). Additionally, Turkmenistan has actively engaged in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, including roads and power supply lines, reflecting its commitment to fostering stability and economic development in the war-torn country (Khamraev, 2020). Turkmenistan has maintained a policy of neutrality and continued diplomatic engagement, emphasizing dialogue and cooperation to ensure regional stability (Bazarov, 2022).

### KEY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

**1. Bilateral Trade Agreements:** Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have entered various trade agreements aimed at enhancing bilateral trade. The establishment of customs cooperation and trade facilitation mechanisms has been a step towards achieving this goal (UNESCAP, 2021).

**2. Economic Corridors:** The development of economic corridors, such as the Lapis Lazuli Corridor, connects Afghanistan with Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and beyond, facilitating trade and cultural exchange. This corridor is expected to diversify Afghanistan's trade routes and enhance its economic resilience (Wiegand, 2020).



**3. TAPI Gas Pipeline:** The TAPI pipeline is a landmark project designed to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan's Galkynysh gas field through Afghanistan to India. The project, initially conceived in the 1990s, has gained renewed momentum in recent years. It is expected to provide 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, thereby enhancing energy security for the participating countries (Sahu, 2021).

**4. Transport Infrastructure:** The construction of roads and railways is vital for improving trade routes between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. The completion of the Afghan-Turkmen border highway and the potential rail links can significantly facilitate trade and movement (Asian Development Bank, 2021).

#### ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN

The economic relationship between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan is characterized by mutual dependence, especially in energy. Afghanistan's strategic location makes it a transit hub for Turkmen energy resources aimed at South Asian markets.

#### INDIA-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS



India-Afghanistan relations have historically been characterized by a deep-rooted partnership, influenced by cultural ties and shared democratic values. Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, India emerged as a significant player in the reconstruction of the country, committing over \$3 billion in aid across various sectors, including infrastructure, education, and health (Rizvi, 2018). India's approach has been largely centered on non-military assistance, emphasizing soft power diplomacy through cultural exchanges and economic development (Mishra, 2021).

## KEY INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVES



**1. Salma Dam:** The Salma Dam, also known as the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, is a significant investment by India in Afghanistan. Completed in 2016, the dam has a capacity of 42 MW and provides irrigation to thousands of hectares of land, enhancing agricultural productivity (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2016).

**2. Road Connectivity:** India has invested heavily in road construction projects, including the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, which connects Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar. This route offers Afghanistan an alternative to the other transit route, boosting trade opportunities (Khan, 2021).



**3. Humanitarian Assistance:** India's commitment extends beyond infrastructure to humanitarian aid, providing food, medicine, and education support, thereby cementing its soft power in the region (Rana, 2022).

**4. Parliament building:** The Afghan Parliament in Kabul was built by India at \$90 million. It was opened in 2015.

**5. Power Infrastructure:** Other Indian projects in Afghanistan include the rebuilding of power infrastructure such as the 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri, to the north of Kabul.

**6. Health Infrastructure:** India has reconstructed a children's hospital it had helped build in Kabul in 1972 — named Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health in 1985. 'Indian Medical Missions' have held free consultation camps in several areas. Thousands who lost their limbs after stepping on mines left over from the war have been fitted with the Jaipur Foot.

**7. Transportation:** India gifted 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for urban transportation, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities, 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army, and 10 ambulances for public hospitals in five cities. It also gave three Air India aircraft to Ariana, the Afghan national carrier, when it was restarting operations.

## BILATERAL TRADE



The India-Afghanistan trade has grown with the establishment of an air freight corridor in 2017. In 2019-20, bilateral trade crossed \$1.3 billion. The balance of trade is heavily tilted — exports from India are worth approximately \$900 million, while Afghanistan's exports to India are about \$500 million. Afghan exports are mainly fresh and dried fruit.

Exports include pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and related materials, cement, and sugar. Trade through Chabahar Port started in 2017 but is restricted by the absence of connectivity from the port to the Afghan border.

## INDIA-TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS

Turkmenistan-India relations have historically been characterized by a combination of cultural ties, economic collaboration, and strategic partnerships, particularly in the energy sector. The diplomatic relationship was formally established in 1992, following Turkmenistan's independence from the Soviet Union. Since then, the two countries have engaged in various cooperative initiatives, with a notable focus on

energy projects, such as the TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India through Afghanistan, which aims to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to India, enhancing energy security for India (Mitra, 2020). Furthermore, both nations have expressed interest in boosting trade relations, with bilateral trade reaching approximately \$13 million in 2021, though there is potential for growth (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2022). Cultural exchanges have also played a vital role, as evidenced by initiatives like the India-Turkmenistan Cultural Exchange Programme, aimed at fostering mutual understanding and collaboration (Embassy of India in Ashgabat, 2023). As both countries seek to diversify their energy sources and strengthen regional ties, the strategic partnership continues to evolve, underscoring the importance of mutual cooperation in a changing geopolitical landscape.

## INDIA, TURKMENISTAN ENERGY COOPERATION

**1. Natural Gas Imports:** India has shown interest in importing natural gas from Turkmenistan via the TAPI pipeline. This aligns with India's broader strategy of diversifying its energy sources to ensure long-term energy security (Singh, 2019).

**2. Trade Growth:** Bilateral trade has grown steadily, with India exporting pharmaceuticals, textiles, and machinery to Turkmenistan. Conversely, India imports cotton and other raw materials from Turkmenistan, highlighting a complementary trade relationship (Ministry of Commerce, India, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The infrastructure projects between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and India are crucial for regional connectivity and economic development. While significant progress has been made, the path forward is fraught with challenges that require coordinated efforts among the stakeholders. Continued investment in infrastructure and economic cooperation can enhance stability and prosperity in this strategically important region.

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