

India's advance in Cen

While three major players i.e. US, Russia and China are already involved in the Great Game in Central Asia, India though a late comer is in the process of creating a niche for itself through aid, investment and offer of cooperation in a number of fields. India has a number of objectives in Central Asia that include seeking a greater role commensurate with its image of the self as a regional power, ridding itself of dependence on the Middle East as the sole source of energy, undercutting China's influence and checkmating Pakistan. India also offers help to end Islamic militancy in Central Asia to secure political support from these countries on the issue of Kashmir.

India's task has been made easy by the fact that governments in at least four of the five Central Asian republics consider Islamic extremism as the gravest threat to their existence. Further they are convinced that Pakistan is the source of terrorism. They consider the former Taliban government which was recognized and fully backed by Pakistan as having been responsible for training and launch-



ing the extremist organizations that still remain the biggest source of worry to them.

Reports have continued to appear since 2002 regarding India having established its first military facility at Farkhor in Tajikistan, though this has been denied by Dushanbe. There has also been an agreement between the two countries to train Tajik military personnel. India has tried to achieve its aim through visits of government leaders, signing of MoUs and a number of economic pacts. It has also encouraged people to people initiatives to invite parliamentarians, diplomats, businessmen and opinion makers to visit industrial and technical centres in India.

The most frequent visitor to India is Kazakh President Nazarbaev who made first visit to New Delhi in 1992 soon after his country's independence, and subsequently in 1993, 1996 and 2002. The two countries have established a Joint Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation. Other spheres of cooperation include technology and defence. Kazakhstan has particular sought Indian help in the field of IT. It is also worried about the incidence of terrorism in neighbouring Kirgystan. This has helped New Delhi make common cause with

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When the communication network is complete, the region will look to Mumbai rather than Karachi.

Astana. The February 2002 Joint declaration signed by President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Prime Minister Vajpayee underlines that fight against terrorism "must also include those who instigate, assist or acquiesce as much as those who perpetuate the terrorist acts" and that "Terrorism cannot be justified in any case or for any reason used as an excuse." It is not difficult to understand to whom the statements is addressed.

India has also developed fairly close relations with Uzbekistan which is threatened by the militant IMU, a close ally of the Taliban which considers Islam Karimov as a prime target. India has played well on the fears of the Uzbek government. In the first week of this month, Indian External affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha was in Tashkent for three days where he