

## India-Turkmenistan Relations

India enjoys close, friendly and historical ties with Turkmenistan. Archaeological finds in south Turkmenistan have revealed contacts with Indus Valley Civilization. Vessels believed to have been used for preparation of Soma drink (mentioned in Rig Veda) found in the ruins of Gonur Depe archaeological site in Mary province supports the theory of early civilizational links between the two countries. Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts, coins and Buddha statue found in the ruins of Merv (present-day Mary city) suggest continuity of cultural and trade linkages. 'Turkmen Gate' built in Delhi in memory of great Turkmen Saint Shams-ul-Arifeen Shah Turkmen Bayabani, who is believed to have lived in India during 13th Century, also bears testimony to this friendship. In modern times bilateral relations have been strengthened by regular high-level visits. Hon'ble President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited India in May 2010. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi visited Turkmenistan in July 2015. During these visits, several significant MoUs and agreements were signed covering areas such as Science & Technology, Defence, Tourism etc.

Institutional mechanisms between the two governments, namely Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) and Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) further buttress bilateral cooperation. The last FOC was held in January 2021 and the last IGC was held in August 2017. India and Turkmenistan cooperate under the India-Central Asia Dialogue mechanism as well, last iteration of which was held in December 2021.

**Culture:** Indian Cinema and TV serials are popular with Turkmen people. Similarly, Indian music also holds a special place in the hearts of Turkmen people. Indian film festivals are held on regular basis in different cities in Turkmenistan. A Turkmen Cultural delegation visited India in November, 2016 for performance in Delhi and Chennai on the occasion of 25th Anniversary of Turkmenistan's Independence. An Indian cultural troupe performed at a friendship concert at Berkerar Mall in Ashgabat on 26th January 2017 as part of Indian's Republic Day celebration. 'India Cultural Week' including exhibition, dance performance, film and food festival was celebrated in Ashgabat in May 2017 to mark 25th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between India and Turkmenistan. An Indian Tabla group visited Turkmenistan for participation in International Scientific Conference and festival "Ancient Cradle of Musical Art" organized by State Cultural Centre of Turkmenistan in April, 2018. A 14-member group "Bollywood Rockers" performed in Turkmenistan in August 2019. An 11-member Turkmen Cultural Folk Group "Galkynysh" visited India to participate in the International Folk Dance and Music Festival in December 2018. Embassy also organized several events as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations in Ashgabat in 2021.

**Traditional Medicine and Yoga Centre:** Central Asia's first Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre was inaugurated by Hon'ble PM of India in Ashgabat in July 2015. Yoga Teacher and Ayurveda Expert have been deputed to the centre from India and offer classes / consultations to interested people, besides teaching in the State Medical University, Ashgabat.

**Education:** India provides training for Turkmen nationals under its ITEC programme. Since the inception of the programme for Turkmenistan in 1994, over 400 Turkmen nationals have been trained in various courses. In addition, India provides ICCR Scholarships to students from Turkmenistan to pursue graduation, post-graduation and Ph. D. There are currently over 300 students from Turkmenistan pursuing their higher education in various reputed universities in India. In 2010, a Hindi Chair was established by India in Azadi Institute of World languages, Ashgabat where Hindi is being taught to university students.

**Air links with Turkmenistan:** Turkmenistan Airlines operated 3 direct flights to New Delhi and 6 flights to Amritsar a week all of which are currently suspended due to Covid-19 pandemic.

**Indian community in Turkmenistan:** There are very few Indian nationals in Turkmenistan. Most are semi-skilled workers employed in construction sector. There are also a few technicians working in oil and gas sector. There are no Indian Associations or Indian students in Turkmenistan.

**Useful Resources:**

Embassy of India, Ashgabat website: <http://www.eoi.gov.in/ashgabat>

*(As on January 2022)*