

# Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the Plenary Session “Central and South Asia: Connectivity”

July 16, 2021

Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov, Dear colleagues and friends,

I am very pleased to participate at this High Level International Conference on Connectivity. I thank the Government of Uzbekistan for this timely and appropriate initiative. And, of course, Minister Kamilov for your hospitality.

2. Robust connectivity within and between Central and South Asia is rooted in history. India’s focus in the last few years has been to rebuild links that were diminished by the colonial period. We have progressed in the Indian Sub-continent and eastwards to the Indo-Pacific. Our horizons today extend from Vladivostok to the Gulf and East-Africa. However, the challenges towards Central-Asia and Eurasia remain to be addressed.

3. Since 2016, India has taken practical steps to operationalize the Chabahar port in Iran. This provides a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for Central Asian countries. Its efficacy is now clearly proven. We have proposed to include the Chabahar port in the framework of INSTC. The formation of India-Uzbekistan-Iran-Afghanistan Quadrilateral Working Group on the joint use of Chabahar port is a welcome development.

4. Economic growth is universally driven by 3Cs: connectivity, commerce and contacts. All three need to come together to ensure regional cooperation and prosperity. The challenge we face is that politics, vested interests and instability can be formidable impediments to its realization. There are lessons too from our experiences that need to be understood. The real issues are of mindsets, not of disputes. Blocking connectivity in practice while professing support in principle benefits no one. A one-sided view of trade rights and obligations can never work. No serious connectivity can ever be a one-way street.

5. Connectivity acquires a particular salience in the context of post-Covid economic recovery. It is itself an

economic multiplier. But there is a widespread realization of the need now for more resilient and reliable supply chains. This is not just a matter of production; it is equally a challenge of efficient logistics. All of us need more and multiple options. And this applies to the domain of connectivity most of all.

6. Development and prosperity go hand in hand with peace and security. For reliable connectivity within and through Afghanistan, the world must have confidence in its governance. Our connectivity deliberations expect predictability, efficiency and observance of norms of our time as its foundation.

7. While expanding connectivity between Central Asia and South Asia, we need to address not just physical infrastructure but all its accompanying facets. Tourism and societal contacts can create a fostering enabling environment. But, at the end of the day, building connectivity is an act of trust and must, at the minimum, conform to international law. Respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity are the most basic principles of international relations.

8. Connectivity efforts must be based on economic viability and financial responsibility. They should promote economic activity and not create debt burdens. Ecological and environmental standards, as also skill and technology transfers, are musts. Connectivity must be consultative, transparent and participatory.

9. We are gathered here today in pursuit of a more prosperous and inter-connected Eurasia. To realise that, I wish to assure you that India stands ready to cooperate, plan, invest and build.

Thank you for your attention!