

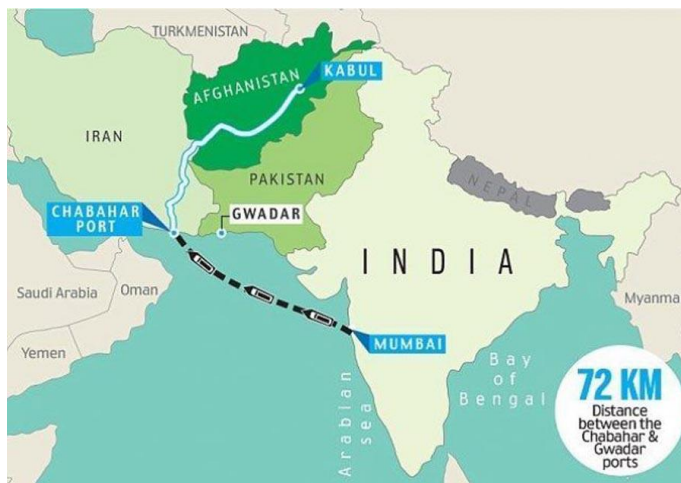


RSTV BIG PICTURE SUMMARY

Joint Use of Chabahar Port

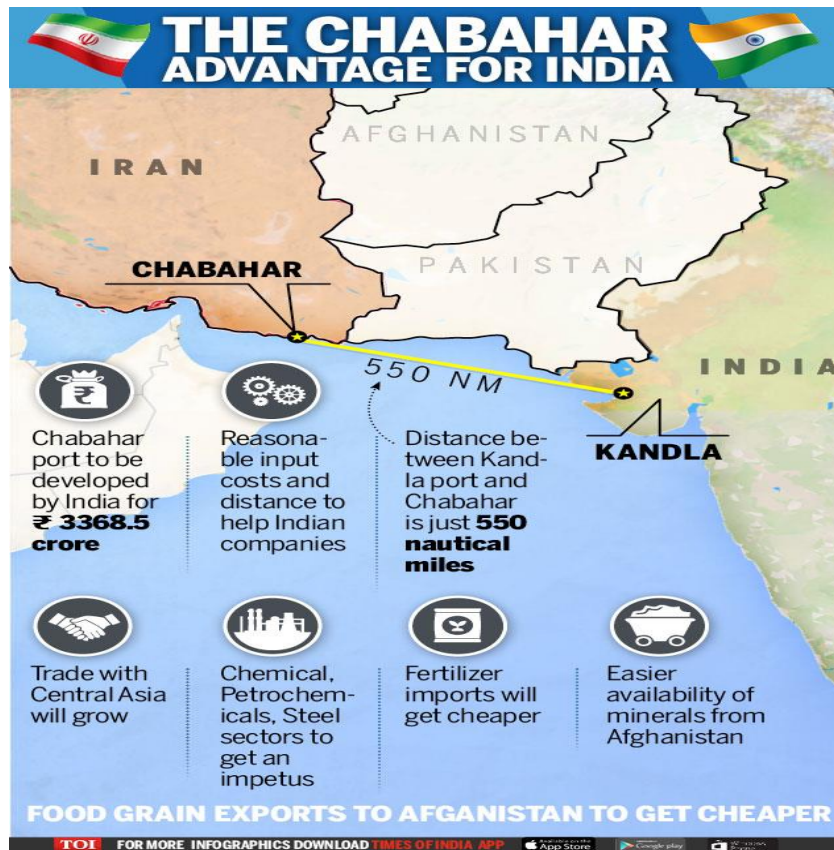
INTRODUCTION:

- The **first Trilateral Working Group Meeting** between **India, Iran and Uzbekistan** on **joint use of Chabahar Port** was held virtually.
- India welcomed **interest of Uzbekistan** to use the Chabahar port as a **transit port**. It will open up economic opportunities for the traders and business community of the region.
- Besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using this port.
- India wants to cooperate closely with regional countries on this issue. India's keenness to explore this option comes from its **desire to extend connectivity into Eurasia**.
- The port is being **developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan** to **boost trade ties** among the three countries in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi.
- Located in the **Sistan-Balochistan province** on the energy-rich **Iran's southern coast**, the port can be easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan.
- It is considered to be a **major transit point to connect with several Central Asian countries**.



Chabahar Port

- It is a seaport in Chabahar located in southeastern Iran, on the **Gulf of Oman**.
- It serves as **Iran's only oceanic port**, and consists of two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti, each of which has five berths.
- The port is partly intended to **provide an alternative for trade between India and Afghanistan** as it is 800 kilometers closer to the border of Afghanistan than Pakistan's Karachi port.
- Being close to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and others, it has been termed the "**Golden Gate**" to these landlocked countries.



Central Asian Connectivity

- The Iranian port of Chabahar has the **potential to shift some of the regional dynamics in India's favor**.
- **Double landlocked Uzbekistan** has been interested in using the port to expand its trade and transit options.
- Uzbekistan has already developed **rail connectivity into Afghanistan** as a means to link with Iranian railway lines reflects Tashkent's seriousness.
- Other Central Asian states like Kazakhstan have also been interested in exploring such options.
- Given the **geostrategic location of Central Asia**, the region is also witnessing a fair share of great power competition.
- The region is viewed as **Russia's immediate backyard** and Moscow has traditionally maintained a dominant role in relations with Central Asia, **China has steadily strengthened its footprint**. India has also been **pursuing both geopolitical and economic ties** with the region.



What Chabahar can offer?

- Chabahar has the potential to **shift** some of the regional **dynamics in India's favor**.
- First, it could prove to be a **gateway to Central Asia and Eurasia**, which can, most importantly, avoid Pakistan.
- It is seen as an effort at **exploring an alternate option for Central Asia to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.

Measures taken to improve ties:

- India has made consistent efforts to re-establish linkages with this region and consider Central Asia a part of the **India's extended neighborhood**. But lack of physical connectivity has proven to be a major hurdle in building trade and economic ties.
- Modi became the first Indian leader to travel to all five Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – in 2015.
- In addition to energy security cooperation, India and Central Asia have both shunned Islamic terrorism and extremist ideology. Fighting cross-border terrorism has become an important common issue shaping their agenda.
- India has also been stepping up defense cooperation with the region, with a defense attaché posted in each of the Indian missions in Central Asia.
- India and Uzbekistan signed a **civil nuclear agreement** in January 2019, under which Uzbekistan **agreed to supply India with uranium**.
- Both countries signed nine agreements including on counterterrorism & infrastructure-related issues and agreed to pursue connectivity projects via the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
 - INSTC is a multi-modal infrastructure initiative spanning around 7,200 km. It encompasses a network of ship, rail and road routes for transporting freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia,



Azerbaijan, and Europe, with the goal of creating transport linkages among major cities including Astrakhan, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Moscow, and Mumbai.

- Feasibility studies undertaken so far has shown significant reduction of transportation costs, to the tune of \$2,500 per 15 tons of cargo.
- India is “pitching for” Uzbek participation in the INSTC connectivity project.

Conclusion:

- India’s push with the trilateral arrangement for Uzbekistan to use Chabahar port is important in the context of **expanding bilateral, trilateral**, as well as broader **regional cooperation**. But more significantly, it is a **geopolitical move aimed at countering growing Chinese influence** in the region.
- India has capacity issues in this regard compared to China, but New Delhi is planning on cashing in on existing projects to expand its reach and linkages so that the Central Asian republics have an alternative to China’s BRI.

<https://thediomat.com/2020/12/india-iran-uzbekistan-pursue-central-asian-connectivity/>

<https://theprint.in/diplomacy/india-iran-uzbekistan-hold-trilateral-meet-discuss-ways-for-joint-use-of-chabahar-port/566772/>