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CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA COOPERATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Аннотация

Аналитики и антропологи полагают, что прямо с рассвета истории Средняя Азия и Южная Азия были частью единого стратегического пространства, аргументируя, что во время Бронзового века в 5-м тысячелетии до нашей эры индоарии приехали в Индию из Каспийской части Средней Азии. Сотрудничество Средней Азии и Южной Азии прогнозирует также утверждение мира и безопасности в Афганистане и Пакистане. Глобализация открыла возможности для создания новой стратегической транспортировки и энергетических коридоров между Средней и Южной Азией. У населения наблюдается большое стремление забыть исторические споры и восстановить прошлую славу, свидетелями которой являются эти две области. Настоящие и будущие поколения заслуживают мира и процветания на основе регионального сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: Средняя Азия и Южная Азия, явление глобализации, новая стратегия транспортировки и энергетических коридоров, настоящее и будущее поколение.

Аңдатпа

Аналитиктер мен антропологтардың айтуына қарағанда, Орта Азия мен Оңтүстік Азия арасындағы байланыстар тарихи негізде дәйектелген. Біздің эрамызға дейінгі 5 ғасырдың өзінде индоарийлері Үндістанға Орта Азияның Каспий өңірінен көшіп келген деген тұжырым бар. Орта Азия мен Оңтүстік Азия арасындағы ынтымақтастық Афганистан мен Пакистанда бейбіт пен қауіпсіздіктің орнауына жағдай туғызады деп есептеледі. Жаһандану Орта Азия мен Орталық Азия арасында тасымал мен энергетикалық байланыстардың жаңа стратегиялық мүмкіндіктерін ашып отыр. Бүгінгі және келер ұрпақ бейбіт өмір жағдайларында қарым-қатынас орнатуды көздейді.

Тірек сөздер: Орта Азия және Оңтүстік Азия, жаһандану, тасымалдау мен энергетикалық коридорлардың жаңа стратегиясы, бүгінгі және келер ұрпақ.

Abstract

Strategic analysts and of anthropologists believe that right from the dawn of history Central Asia and South Asia have been part of the same strategic space and that Indo-Aryans came to India from the Caspian region of Central Asia (hereafter, CA) during Bronze Age of 5th millennium BC. The prognosis of Central Asia and South Asia cooperation is predicated on peace and security in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The phenomenon of globalization has opened the possibilities of creating new strategic transportation and energy corridors between Central Asia and South Asia. There is a great aspiration in people to forget historical disputes and re-establish the past glory witnessed by the two regions. The present and future generations deserve peace and prosperity inter alia regional cooperation.

Key words: Central Asia and South Asia, phenomenon of globalization, new strategic transportation and energy corridors, the present and future generation.

Background

1. Strategic analysts believe that right from the dawn of history Central Asia and South Asia have been part of the same strategic space. Geographically, the 'Pamir Knot' can be described as a pivot where Central Asia and South Asia meet. The Pamir Mountains are a mountain range in Central Asia formed by the junction of the Himalayas with Tian Shan, Karakoram, Kunlun, and Hindu Kush ranges [1]. Central Asia and South Asia together form an essential part of Eurasia. In geostrategic terms, Halford Mackinder, the 19th century British geographer, described Eurasia as the "heartland of history" and he argued that whosoever "controls it controls the world" [2]. The known strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski highlights the importance of Eurasia in these words, "ever since the continents started interacting politically, some five hundred years ago, Eurasia has been the centre of world power" [3]. Geographically, the Central Asian landmass forms the very core of Eurasia. It is in this area that the strategic frontiers of Central Asia, China, Afghanistan, and pre-partitioned India meet. Southern Asia comprises the sub-Himalayan countries south of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. According to the United Nations geographical region classification, Southern Asia comprises the

countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka [1]. It is noteworthy, that among Southern Asia countries Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and India bear close relationship with the CAR in terms of geographic proximity and ipso facto diplomatic relations. The five land locked CAR are geographically linked with the Indian sub-continent through Afghanistan/ Iran and Pakistan.

2. A section of anthropologists believe that Indo-Aryans came to India from the Caspian region of Central Asia (hereafter, CA) during Bronze Age of 5th millennium BC [4]. Indus Valley Civilization had trade and cultural contacts with Altyn Depe, an ancient civilization of Turkmenistan. During the Harappan Age trading activity was part and parcel of civilizational interaction. Takshashila (now in Pakistan), strategically located on the river Indus and the city of Purushpura near Peshawar (Now in Pakistan) were the key centers of Indian land route to Central Asia and beyond. Historians believe that Sakas came to India around 5th Century BC from southern Kazakhstan. Vairochana, a Buddhist scholar from Kashmir, was the first missionary to introduce Buddhism into CA Indian philosophy, languages and literature, art and architecture started influencing way of life in CA. No wonder, north Indian culture bears close similarities with that of Central Asian States (CAS). Khoja Akhmet founder of the Yassawi and Mir Syed Ali Hamadani strands of Sufism came to India from CA. Roman geographer, mathematician and astronomer, Ptolemy, wrote on "Indikomandana," (City of Indians) located north of Amu-Darya in Uzbekistan. Religious and commercial colonies of Indians existed in Turkmenistan and western Kazakhstan. Many branches of Silk Route emerged connecting China and India with Europe from the oases of Bukhara and Samarkand. Kashmiri shawls and woollen and silk carpets were in great demand and Indian merchants traversed long distances via Caspian region to reach Kolkheti on the Black Sea in and traded with Parthians and Soghdians" [5]. Starr (2010), expert and Chairman of Central Asia – Caucasus Institute opines, "India's level of knowledge of CA is far superior to that of China, while its cultural literacy concerning the region far outshines that of Russia, Europe, or America" [6].

3. The developments in CA have always impacted South Asia in many ways. All major invasions (Alexander Chengiz Khan, Amir Timur, and Babur) into India emanated from CA. Babur hailed from Andijan in Fergana valley. Khilji dynasty owed their origin to Turkmen tribes. The 'Great Game' of 19th century between the Great Britain and Russia for domination of CA was all about protection of British trade from Kashgar to India and need for a buffer to protect India from Russian invasions. The outcome was emergence of Afghanistan as a buffer state. Another landmark event that altered the geopolitical landscape of the region was creation of Pakistan in 1947. Historically, India was connected with Central Asia through northwestern region. Creation of Pakistan drove a strategic wedge between India and Afghanistan and CAR thus depriving the region of many opportunities of cooperation and integration. The 'Great Power' rivalry during the eighties in the twentieth century resulted in Afghanistan-Pakistan becoming an epicenter of international terrorism, which has had a direct impact on CAR and Southern Asian Security. Post break up of Soviet Union and creation of five CAR, geo-political competition termed as 'New Great Game' has become intricate with more number of players pursuing competing strategic interests. At the heart of emerging geopolitical developments in the region are the: the idea of creating a New Silk Route connecting Central Asia and South Asia and construction of new pipelines and power grids.

Areas of Strategic Cooperation

4. The New Silk Route. The ancient Silk Route was the main conduit of trade, science and spirituality between China and South Asia. Central Asia became a crucible of cross-fertilization of civilizations. The idea of New Silk Route is anchored in establishing a commerce and trade link from Central Asia to South Asia and Middle East through Afghanistan and Iran respectively. This concept was articulated by Hillary Clinton while speaking in September 2012 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. She argued in favor New silk Road in terms of a network of road, rail, and energy links that would traverse Central Asia and enable Turkmen gas to fuel the subcontinent's economic growth, cotton from Tajikistan to fill India's textile mills, and Afghan produce to reach markets across Asia. By enhancing economic integration, the strategy aims to boost local economies and stabilize the region [7]. The 'Heart of Asia' conference in November 2011 led to the Istanbul process, which has endorsed Afghanistan's emergence as the land bridge connecting South Asia with Central Asia.

Efforts by countries to mobilize support and implementation of this process are going on. The Second "Heart of Asia conference" is scheduled for the last week of August 2014 probably to take a stock of the progress in this objective. Hopefully progress in this direction could be anticipated. The concept of the New Silk Road could be interpreted in terms of the following transportation and energy corridors:-

– Central Asia – Xinjiang – Pakistan Corridor. This economic corridor is a under-construction to connect Gwadar Port in southern Pakistan to China's easternmost province of Xinjiang via highways, railway's and pipelines to transport oil and gas. When the corridor is constructed it will serve as a primary gateway for trade between China and Middle East and Africa, in particular oil from the Middle East could be offloaded at Gwadar, which is located just outside the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and transported to China through the Baluchistan province in Pakistan. Such a link would vastly cut the 12,000-kilometre route that Mideast oil supplies must now take to reach Chinese ports. China have signed agreements for constructing an international airport at Gwadar, for upgrading a section of the 1,300-kilometre Karakorum Highway connecting to Islamabad and of a fibre-optic cable to be laid from the Chinese border to Rawalpindi. With the development of the corridor, Central Asia, traditionally an economically closed region owing to its geography and lack of infrastructure, will have greater access to the sea and to the global trade network. With the improvement in India – Pakistan relations this corridor can be extended to India and through the Indian territory to other South Asian countries [8].

– East Iranian Corridor. Padukone in Foreign Policy article highlights the importance of this corridor. Iran provides a strategic transportation avenue between Central Asia and South Asia due to its strategic location between, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, stable Sistan-Baluchistan and Khorasan provinces, and onward to the town of Milak on the Afghan border. From there it connects with the Zaranj-Delaram highway (built by India) in western Afghanistan's Nimruz Province, which subsequently links to the Afghan Ring Road. There is a proposal to construct a railway line along the entire route to facilitate trade and harness mineral resources of Afghanistan. The importance of Chabahar road lies in the fact that it is far shorter (135 Km) vis a vis 1,100-mile long road from Karachi to the Torkham border in northeastern Pakistan, and even shorter than the 500 miles from Karachi to the Chaman border in northwest Pakistan. Thomas Barfield, author of the comprehensive Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History, puts it succinctly: the «new transport corridor» through Chabahar «ends Pakistan's monopoly on seaborne transit trade to Afghanistan... [making] Iran the most efficient transit route into Central Asia» [9].

– International North – South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The third option is the INSTC. This goes from Mumbai via sea to Bandar Abbas and through the Iranian territory to Caspian Sea and Russia. Since Kazakhstan has joined INSTC and is connected with Turkmenistan by rail. A section from northern Iran (Gurgan) to Turkmenistan – a rail link is necessary. As and when completed it would give INSTC a continuous rail link from Bandar Abbas via Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan to Russia. India has urged Iran and Russia to accord higher importance in early operationalization of this vital strategic transportation corridor.

– Maritime Silk Route. China, besides gaining access to the Arabian Sea through Karakoram highway is developing another corridor along the eastern flank of India i.e Kunming, Sittwe (Myanmar) and Dacca/Chittagong (Bangladesh) corridor. China proposed BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) forum for regional cooperation. India on the other hand is pursuing its 'Look East Policy' by developing road connectivity from its northeast to Southeast Asia via Myanmar. China has also mooted the concept of Maritime Silk Route and asked India to join it. With the passage of time when Indian and Chinese economies grow and become interdependent the continental Silk Roads though China – Central Asia Afghanistan/Iran /Pakistan /Myanmar will reach the Indian Ocean and hopefully get integrated with a maze of extensive transportation corridors of India subcontinent and through the trade routes in Indian Ocean extend further to the Southeast Asia [10].

Energy Corridors

5. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline. The 1680 kilometer long pipeline is expected to transport natural gas from the Turkmen gas field at Daulatabad or from the newer South Yolotan-Osman field that is already supplying gas to China. This pipeline would run via Herat and Kandahar in Afghanistan to Quetta and Multan in Pakistan and then to Fazilka (Punjab) in India. The pipeline would carry 33 billion cubic meters per year (bcm/y) of gas, and the approximately \$7.6

billion cost would be one-third financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is willing to provide a large part of Pakistan's equity in the project [11]. The Afghan government is expected to receive 8% of the project 'revenue' [12]. Reportedly, Russian oil and gas company Gazprom and U.S. energy majors Chevron and ExxonMobil are among other competitors seeking a stake in the project. India's state-owned natural gas processing and distribution company GAIL (India) is eyeing a minor holding in the planned consortium [13].

6. Iran Pakistan India (IPI) Route. This gas pipeline, also known as the 'Peace Pipeline', is a proposed 2,775 km gas pipeline project, from Asaluyeh in Iran to Pakistan and India. The project is expected to benefit both India and Pakistan. The total cost of the project was estimated to be over \$ 7 billion in 2006. The pipeline from Iran's giant South Pars gas field will initially carry around 60 million standard cu m per day of gas [14]. The three countries involved appear determined to treat the pipeline as independent from the vagaries of day-to-day politics. Pakistan has proposed extension of IPI to China as well [15]. The construction of the pipeline would take minimum three years. The prevailing political and security environment, however, is not conducive for the realization of the project in the foreseeable future.

7. Hydropwer Grid. USA announced a plan, in 2006, to foster stronger energy links between Central and South Asia [16]. As part of Regional Energy Market Assistance Programme (REMAP), USAID will aim to make it easier for CA's main electricity producers, especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to connect with power consuming neighbours. A World Bank study envisions the development of a blueprint for electricity exports to South Asia to fill the growing demand of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Pakistan has evinced interest in building of \$500 million hydel power station in Tajikistan. CASA-1000, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Trade and Transmission Project, is another regional initiative to link up the electrical power systems of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with electricity-poor Pakistan and Afghanistan. The project is intended to transport 1,000 to 1,300 Megawatts (MW) of surplus electricity from the two Central Asian republics to their South Asian neighbors [17]. However, the \$873 million project has achieved only 10 percent of its stated aims since it was implemented five years ago. USA seeks India's involvement in the electricity projects, with the obvious aim of making it financially viable; India has presently shown technical interest only. However, scope exists for India to undertake joint with international financial institutions, to promote and efficiently utilize the hydropower potential of CAR. It is viable to transport electrons over as long as 3000 km or more [18]. NTPC or private power companies like TATA or Reliance can set-up Combined Cycle Gas Turbine power plants in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan and India's NPGC can lay high voltage lines that can transmit electricity to Himachal Pradesh via China. Kyrgyzstan has opened up its infrastructure for foreign investors. India's NHPC has experience in the construction of hydel projects in difficult mountainous terrain and could explore the possibility of setting up hydel stations as joint venture projects with Kyrgyz companies. Similarly, Tajikistan is privatizing its power sector and there are already private investors owning hydel Plants that are not grid-connected. NHPC and NTPC can explore joint venture options in this country as well.

8. Nuclear Fuel. As per report by Nomura International forecasts (quoted in Jamestown.org), a deficit of uranium ore is likely to occur within five years, due to heavy demand from China, India, Russia, and South Korea in the future. Kazakhstan is interested in profiting from its energy exports to diverse suppliers and strengthening its geopolitical position vis-a-vis its two large neighbours – Russia and China. China is already the largest buyer of Kazakh uranium. Deputy Head of State Energy Management of China, Tian Zhiming, commented on Beijing's appetite for nuclear energy: «The PRC will become the world's largest consumers of uranium by 2030, overtaking the US. In 2011, Kazakhstan agreed to supply 55,000 tonnes of uranium to China over the next 10 years. In the long term, Kazakhstan can supply up to 40% of nuclear fuel to China [19]. India too moved a step towards more intensive collaboration with Kazakhstan in nuclear energy with the signing of the Agreement on Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy. Kazakhstan has supplied India with uranium under a deal signed in early 2009 between Kazakh nuclear holding corporation Kazatomprom and Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL). Recently concluded agreement will broaden the base of cooperation to include exploration and research of uranium [20]. As per Security-Risk website, "the nuclear deal termed as an umbrella agreement includes, "legal framework for mutually

beneficial cooperation between the two sides in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy including fuel supply, nuclear medicine, use of radiation technologies for healthcare including isotopes, reactor safety mechanisms, exchange of scientific and research information, exploration and joint mining of uranium, design, construction and operation of nuclear power plants etc. The key take away is supply of 2100 tonnes of uranium by Kazakhstan by 2030 to India which may partially take care of the country's nuclear fuel needs" [21]. However, much of fructification of this deal would depend on how India braces up to the competition from other powerful players in the uranium race.

Challenges

9. Security Scenario In Afghanistan and Pakistan. The biggest challenge for realization of cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia comes from Talibanisation of Afghanistan and Pakistan. A successful transition of power in Kabul is critical for rebuilding security in the region. As per STRATFOR – prestigious premium intelligence related think tank, post April 2014 elections, the new Afghan government will struggle to consolidate power and stifle the insurgency. There is a possibility of elections getting mired due to electoral fraud. Afghan political disputes can transform into armed clashes divide security forces along partisan lines. Such a scenario could prove catastrophic, particularly since the state is already trying to deal with the Taliban insurgency. Afghanistan witnessed this kind of scenario after the fall of the Marxist regime in 1992 that led protracted and bloody civil war and birth of Taliban movement. Such a politically volatile scenario in the face of rising specter of Taliban offensive in the south and east Afghanistan and withdrawal of US and NATO forces would be the most worrisome development. The reconciliation process between Pakistan, Karzai, US and various Taliban factions is shrouded in a maze of uncertainties. Outwardly, Pakistan has been trying to cooperate with the Afghan government in an effort to steer the Taliban and the government to share power. However, given Taliban hardcore ideology i.e to establish a Caliphate in Afghanistan the chances of these Jihadi forces to adapt to democratic style looks improbable. In case post election there is political turmoil and factional feuds between various political entities, it will suit Taliban strategic objective of projecting as a viable alternative of Islamic governance to the Afghan masses. The Afghan state, though weak, could hold the line against the insurgency, especially with the support of any residual U.S. military force that would remain behind until 2024. However, this would depend upon signing of bilateral security agreement between the newly elected Afghan president and the US [22]. In Afghanistan, the strategic objectives of Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and India Intersect in many ways.. Pakistan is obsessed with its idea of achieving strategic depth in Afghanistan and maintains the sanctity of "Durand line through a pro-Pakistan and anti India regime. India on the other hand has traditionally enjoyed excellent relations with the elite and common people of Afghanistan across the complete ethnic spectrum. Sustained engagement with a democratic Afghanistan is vital for India's regional periphery and Central Asia policy. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia, which favors spread of Salafi-Wahhabi ideology, runs at cross purposes with Shia brand of Islam followed by Iran. While Iran as per some media reports renders tactical support to Taliban to combat the US, but at the strategic level it is opposed to Afghanistan being ruled by Sunni fundamentalist Taliban regime. Strategic transportation corridors and energy grids pass through Pakistan's strife torn areas of Northwest and Baluchistan Pakistan is facing a major internal security threat in these provinces from Tehrik e Taliban of Pakistan and Baluch insurgents. Continued conflict in these provinces will seriously undermine the prospects of strategic cooperation between South Asia and Central Asia. Seeing from a long term strategic perspective, the security interests of US, Russia, CAR, Iran, India and China coalesce in Afghanistan. The rise of Taliban in Afghanistan will be inimical to the national security of all these countries. However, ongoing Ukrainian crisis has compounded the strategic mistrust thus further precluding the possibility of any major engagement on Afghanistan between Russia, US and China at this juncture. Continued conflict in the AF-Pak region is keeping the major financiers, builder companies and other stakeholders hedging their bets on these dream transportation and energy grid projects.

Future prospects

10. The prognosis of Central Asia and South Asia cooperation is predicated on peace and security in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Unless there is viable peace in this region most of the transportation and energy grids will face obstructions in terms of finding financial institutions to fund the projects or the construction companies undertaking the work on the ground. Strategic mistrust between

India, China and Pakistan is another factor that needs to be addressed. Besides the international community, it dawned upon the regional countries such as Russia, China, India, Iran, CAR and Pakistan to contribute in the peace and security of Afghanistan. Pakistan needs special attention to nudge it to shed off chronic obsession to use Jihad as an instrument of state policy against Afghanistan and India. Granting a MFN status to India and permitting trade between India, Afghanistan and Central Asia over its territory will help Pakistan a great deal in earning huge sums of trade fees and reduce the cost of Indian imports, which takes place through Dubai. While it may take time for a thaw in Indo – Pak relations, the other avenues of geographical connectivity and flow of fossil fuel energy between Central Asia and South Asia need to be explored. In this connection early construction of Chabahar route via Eastern Iran link and INSTC merit a special mention. The early operationalization of these corridors will provide necessary transportation connectivity between CAR and South Asia via Iran and Afghanistan bypassing intransigent and unstable Pakistan. Other potential trade corridors that can be opened up are from India's Ladakh (Jammu and Kashmir) and Sataluj Corridor (Punjab-Himachal Pradesh) connecting with the Chinese Western Highway and further to Xinjiang and CAR. Opening of these routes, however is predicated on overall course and complexion of India – China relations and resolution of vexed border issue between the two countries. TAPI and IPI pipeline network once operational can further be linked to the Central Asian energy grid for exporting even Kazakh oil to South Asian markets. It would be pertinent to mention that India is the main driver of South Asia – Central Asia cooperation. It is one of the largest economies in the world and its oil and gas consumption is bound to grow. It seeks alternate sources of energy from CAR and Iran. India is an important stakeholder in peace and security of Afghanistan. Traditionally, India enjoys excellent relations with Russia and CAR. China has emerged India's largest trading partner and the trading between these two countries is poised to cross 100 billion dollar mark. India considers Central Asia as its strategic neighborhood and seeks closer strategic partnership with CAR. India has signed strategic partnership agreements with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and enjoys warm relations with Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. India is keen to become a member of SCO, actively participate in the CICA process, Custom Union and Collective Security Treaty organization and other regional forums. For furtherance of its strategic relations with CAR, India articulated a India Connect Central Asia Policy in Jun 2012. The key features of this policy are as under:-

- Build strong political relations through bilateral and multi-lateral institutions such as UN, SCO, CICA, World Religious Meet, Strategic Partnership agreements and rendering assistance in developing democratic Institutions.
- Strengthen Strategic and Security Cooperation, undertake joint research, and cooperate in combating terrorism and peace and security in Afghanistan.
- Multilateral Economic Engagement under the aegis of SCO, ECC, Custom Union and comprehensive economic cooperation agreement.
- Long Term Partnership in Energy and Natural Resources such as hydrocarbons, Uranium, super. Alloys, hydel-power, agriculture Land.
- Medical Field such as tele-medicines and setting up Civil Hospitals / Clinics.
- Central Asian University at Bishkek-IT management, Philosophy, Languages.
- Setting-Up.. E-Network. Tele-medicine, distant e learning programmes connectivity.
- Construction Sector. Infrastructure and Steel Mills.
- Geographic Connectivity. North – South Corridor, Iran-Afghanistan, Central Asia road network
- Tourism and Film Industry, Heritage sites.
- Develop People to People Contact through ITEC, and exchange of youth programmes, adventure and delegations

Concluding Remarks

11. South Asia and Central Asia were integrated in the past through the ancient Silk Route. Besides geographical proximity the two regions share common historical past, rich culture and civilizational links. The link between the two regions was disrupted due to geopolitical changes during the colonial era, which among other things divided India and created Pakistan as a wedge between the two regions. The great power rivalry led to the radicalization of Af-Pak region thus deteriorating the security scenario in the region. However, the phenomenon of globalization has opened the possibilities of creating new strategic transportation and energy corridors between Central Asia and South Asia. There is a great aspiration in people to forget historical disputes and re-establish the past glory

witnessed by the two regions. It dawns upon the leadership of these countries to collectively work towards restoring peace and tranquility in Af-Pak region, nudge the nations to discard traditional rivalries and embrace new opportunities for economic and cultural integration of two vibrant regions and their versatile peoples. The present and future generations deserve peace and prosperity inter alia regional cooperation.

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