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## REVIVAL OF SILK ROUTE CONNECTIVITY: STRATEGIES OF NEW REGIONALISM

### Abstract

*Silk Route* is one of the greatest sagas of human endeavor is being revived in the view of the fast changing world order, however, with varying perceptions. Revival of the Silk route connectivity and development of the transport corridors and improving the linkages will increase the regional cooperation and can be considered as a major tool for transport and trade developments.

### Аннотация

Шелковый путь, который являлся одной из величайших саг человеческой деятельности, возрождается в связи с быстро меняющимся мировым порядком, но уже с разных перспектив. Возрождение сношений Шелкового пути, развитие транспортных коридоров и улучшение связей увеличит региональное сотрудничество и может рассматриваться в качестве основного инструмента транспорта и торговли.

### Аңдатпа

Адам қызметінің керемет сағасының бірі – Жібек жолы тез өзгертін әлемдік тәртіпке байланысты туындайды. Жібек жолының пайда болуы мен көлік дәліздерінің дамуы мен байланыстарды жақсарту өңірлік ынтымақтастықты ұлғайтып, көлік пен сауданың негізгі құралы ретінде қарастырылады.

*Silk Route* is one of the greatest sagas of human endeavor is being revived in the view of the fast changing world order, however, with varying perceptions. The idea of reviving the *Silk Route* connectivity and bring the countries of the Eurasian region with the neighbouring States is a mega cross-border project with number of challenges ahead. This could be accomplished with close cooperation, strong political will and economic support. Many regional countries are involved in the revival process of the silk route calling it as the 'new silk route', as per their convenience.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1990, the revival of the 'silk route' is being discussed enthusiastically at all levels by the interested States, organizations, and intelligentsia and also by the cultural and business circles. In 1988, UNESCO declared launching of the ten years project entitles "Integrated studying of the silk route-the way of dialogue". Numerous scientific conferences and Seminars were held under the auspices of this project. Films were created, books, brochures and articles were published and few monuments of archeological and architectural importance were also restored. Creation of folk-ethnographic centers, museums, revival of national trade and crafts centers and educational activities were also intensified. Specific research activities were initiated to study the Silk route connectivity in India, China, Japan and in Sri Lanka. Again in 1993, at the general assembly of the United Nations (held in Indonesia) a decision was taken to revive the Silk-route as a major channel for the international cooperation. On 7th – 8th September, 1998 a conference was held in Baku to create an international transport corridor for connecting Europe-Caucasus-Asia and an agreement was also signed by 32 Countries including Japan, South Korea, China, India and Russia. The agreement included the proposals for construction of more than 14.000 kms. Trans-Asiatic road to connect the countries of the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean and possible route map was designed passing from Japan to Turkey and from China to Bulgaria. Also it was proposed that a speed way will be constructed to connect St. Petersburg with Tokyo and also Helsinki with Khabarovsk. The Asian development Bank's (ADB) programme for the restoration and revival of the 'Silk Route' involved in repairing the road-transport trunk connecting Xinjian-Uygur autonomous region of China (Eastern Turkestan) with Central Asia and Iran.<sup>2</sup> The 2001 UN development programme (UNDP) for the silk route region even aimed for expanding the religious corporation and development through this route.

The revival of the 'silk route' connectivity and the transport network is bound to impact economies and the markets positively. The transport linkages can definitely be beneficial for the growth and prosperity of the country but it can also bring disastrous impact and increase security concerns depending on the situation of the Country though which the route passes. Revival of the 'silk route'

<sup>1</sup> Alan Lee Boyer, "Recreating the Silk Road: The Challenges of over-coming transaction costs", *China and Eurasia Vol. IV, no.4, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Route Studies Programme*, 2006, pp.72–74.)

<sup>2</sup> "Zhemnin Zhibao", 17 May, 2002

connectivity has already proved beneficial for the region taking advantage of the existing potential.<sup>1</sup> There has been a sudden upsurge in the renewal of the regional transportation through physical development of routes as well as trade linkages and networks. New linkages in addition to upgrading of existing national and international infrastructures have also been taken-up seriously for past few years. As a consequence most of the Countries of the region with improved political stability are coming forward with this common agenda of bridging their fragmented networks in order to establish and develop the regional and sub-regional transport system.<sup>2</sup> Hence, revival of the 'silk route' connection and development of the transport linkages and network has become a priority for many countries not only in the region but also around the world.

This paper tries to highlight the significance of the silk route and its connectivity and focuses on the possible transport linkages between India and the Eurasian region. The chapter also tries to bring out the importance of certain connectivity and network specifically for India giving overview of the regional perspectives. Also the chapter focuses on the need to provide more attention on certain transport network initiatives for increasing the international trade, commerce and for the smooth energy flow and maintain peace and prosperity in the region.

### **Regional Transport & Silk Route Network**

In today's world there is a growing tendency of interdependency<sup>3</sup> Oflate, inter-dependency of different social groups, states and regions have increased considerably. Today, the trans-continental transport communication increases the extend of interdependency of various States and regions and consequently enhances the degree of confidence and security and lowers the risk and conflict. The new transport highways will increase human contacts and intensify cultural interactions. However, there is a need to balance economic growth of various regions and narrow down the discrepancy between the advanced and less developed countries.

The transportation corridor (both road-transport and railways) enables in creating a huge and prosperous market along the routes. Besides, the immense investments also allows to build-up transcontinental infrastructure, as well as, creation of thousands of jobs and the economic growth. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the trans-Siberian line made a great impact on the development of Russian cities such as Omsk, Krasnoyars, Irkutsk, Chita, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, etc. New transport corridors also intend to integrate Eurasian space into the world economy and boost modernization process of the regional countries.<sup>4</sup> The pragmatism of such transportation passage is not only to provide opportunities for the economic development but it are the cheapest and swiftest method of exercising delivery of goods and maintain people to people contact. It is also going to encourage the enactment of common laws for customs and taxation to remove barriers for commodity flow and easing the commercial activities.

Interest in reviving the 'silk route' also enables to expand the tourism activities along its routes. Since it is one of the most attractive routes and the longest in the World (around 12800 kms). In this respect, a significant role is being played by the World tourist organization. According to World Tourist Organization and UNESCO, the 'silk route' by 2020 is expected to become the most attractive route for the tourists. The countries involved will be able to reap the benefits of huge herbal wealth sprawled over the vast mountainous patches which will have the potential of revolutionizing the regional *homeopathy* and *Ayurvedic* system of medicine made up of herbs and seeds.<sup>5</sup> It will also help in uniting the divided families and reducing the prevailing tensions on borders thereby decreasing the defence budgets and increasing the state's welfare and social security budget.<sup>6</sup> (The 'silk route' has unique scenic beauty of the sand dunes, hot cold water gushes, colourful vegetation, multi-colour hill tops and waning glaciers and a continuous mountain chain on one side while on the other side rivers flow along the roads. The 'silk route' is expected to help in the integration-transportation-trading and in increasing the cultural connectivity, focusing on the interests of all the concerned countries. Asia-Pacific | Asia takes first step on modern 'Silk Route'". BBC News. 05.01. 2013. Today, it has all possibilities to raise this integration to the highest level with the help of modern technologies to carry forward the greatness of this ancient route in future.

<sup>1</sup> The Megalithic Portal and Megalith Map. «Silk Road, North China», C.M. Hogan, the Megalithic Portal, ed. A. Burnham». Megalithic.co.uk. <http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=18006>. 13.07.2011

<sup>2</sup> (Boulnois, Luce (2005). *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors & Merchants*. Hong Kong: Odyssey Books. p. 66.)

<sup>3</sup> K. Jaspers, «Sense and Perpouse of History», Moscow, 1994, p.141.

<sup>4</sup> The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce. UNESCO Publishing / Berghahn Book. 2001

<sup>5</sup> Ash Narain Roy, («A Corridor of Prosperity», available at [www.hardnewsmedia.com](http://www.hardnewsmedia.com))

<sup>6</sup> G. M. Mir, «Resource management, regional cooperation and sustainable development states», New Delhi, 2003

### India and the New Silk-Route

India is ideally positioned to expand the volume and direction of land-trade across Eurasia for the economic resurgence of the region. In fact, India has initiated the route revitalization process in view of globalization and free trade. India has already started renewing the age-old relations with its extended neighbours in Eurasia by reviving some branches of the 'silk route'.<sup>1</sup> This is essential for the development of the region, however, some potential branches are yet to be revived to realize the regional cooperation and for the overall development. The old routes connect India directly with two strategically important neighbours i.e. Pakistan and China. Kashmir and Ladakh allows India to get re-connected with China and Pakistan as Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) and Skardu (now in Pakistan administered Kashmir) have the highest strategic as well as geo-economic importance for the countries concerned.<sup>2</sup>

Nubra Valley in Ladakh is the gateway to Eurasia, has two 'silk route' branches connecting India with Pakistan and China. Both the trade arteries contributed for centuries as Institution of dialogue. The route for Kashmir after crossing Kahrung La, one of the World's motorable roads, bifurcates near Khalsar. One crosses river Shyok near Tirth and takes northwards bend almost parallel to Siachen river upto Ullan Pati Nallah. This stream is few kms. ahead of the Panamik, the hot-spring zone and just short of Siachen glacier, after which the route turns north-west to cross Saser La reaching Yarkand and other markets of China and the Central Asia region and the Karakoram Pass through Dispan Plain.

Another route moves towards west, parallel to Shyok River, via Diskit-Turkut-Kapalu-Skardu to connect India with Pakistan. This route was used till the mid 20th century; however, this route was closed due to the complicated political relationship between India and Pakistan and India and China. Nonetheless, this has proved a great setback to the socio-economic structure of the countries concerned as well as on the people of both the sides of the borders, as huge chunk of the population was dis-engaged, families were divided and relations were shattered leading to overall depression. However, it is important to note that these routes were also used for illegal trade; narco trafficking and for spying activities and also for the cross-border terrorism, increasing the security concerns and affecting the development of the region. Though some of these branches have vanished and some have lost their importance, yet there is a wide scope for restoring certain branches in the interest of the stake-holders.

### Revival & Regional Developments

It is a known fact that the 'Silk Route' is the oldest network known to mankind since 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC that has played greater role for the regional development. A continuous process of competing to connect the nations and regions at appropriate interceptions throughout its evolution also made it a complete communication network system and a "Road of dialogue". Unfortunately, its demise was so quick that all the traces of the glorious past were eradicated. The 'silk route' is now renewed in new fashion with new interest and loyalties and it is expected to play a major role in the regional cooperation. This route will help in the peaceful co-existence and address the regional security threats.

#### *Significant Routes:*

Some of the significant routes are as follows:

The *Leh-Panamik-Yarkand Route*, the northern route connecting Ladakh with Yarkand and other cities of China & Central Asia via Karakoram always remained a route of choice for caravans as there were two sub-routes which made the travelling possible. During the Dogra rule (1846–1947) in Kashmir, the government allocated a specific annual budget for the maintenance of this route. Hence, Sarais (Motels) and other facilities were developed at various spots where traders received supplies for men and animals. Dominated by Buddhist settlements, the villages had the longitudinal sprawl along the roads and the population & stock densities were mostly dependent on the availability of water in the nearby area. Even today, all along the road there exists grave yards of Yarkandies (khojas) and other ill fated traders and travelers. The emotional attachment has always played a significant role here. The continuation of growing crops and preserving the wild fruits cherished by caravans and multi-cut fodder variety then consumed by animals still can be found in this area which also depicts preservation of the sentimental values. Hence, reopening of these routes will elevate the economic condition as well as they will even connect people of various races and colours.

<sup>1</sup> *Approaches Old and New to the Silk Roads» Eliseeff in: The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce. Paris (1998) UNESCO, Reprint: Berghahn Books (2009), pp. 1–2.*

<sup>2</sup> David Gosset, "Xinjiang and the revival of Silk Route", Greater China, 200

Another significant route is *Leh-Turtuk-Skardu Route*, after leaving Shyok-Siachen confluence near Diskit, the western route goes parallel to Shyok River taking its west bank upto Thang. Here it is joined by another trade artery coming from Leh via Skiribichan after crossing Chorbit La, it crisscrosses the Shyok to enter through Khapalu. A fully metallic road safe for two-way vehicular movement on smooth gradient, this route runs along the foothills and some of the oldest settlements are located along this route. During the glorious period of trade, in order to ease the access to supply lines for both human and animals this was very prominent road connection. Many villages were located near this route in summer but shifted to the lower foothills during winter to avoid extreme cold and snow storms on upper reaches. It is known that it'll be indeed beneficial and interesting for all the countries concerned to revive the silk route for economic and trade prospects. However, this promising opportunity needs to be redeemed. All the three basic components i.e. geographical proximity, technological feasibility and economic viability favours the revival.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, there has to be proper access between or among the countries for economic integration and regional cooperation. Though some of the landlocked developing countries face tough time exporting their products and as a result they trade less and grow slowly in comparison to their coastal neighbours. There are other problems faced by the landlocked countries such as border delays due to multiple clearance processes, security problems and weak custom administration and corruption. All these also contribute to the artificially hiked transport costs.<sup>2</sup> Thus, regional cooperation in improving the connectivity plays a significant role in bringing down these gaps while promoting economic integration.<sup>3</sup> Most of the countries of the region today with improved political stability are coming forward with a common agenda for establishing and developing the regional and sub-regional transport system.<sup>4</sup>

### Significant Regional Transport Corridors

There are number of transport corridors developing in the Eurasian region connecting the countries of the region with each other. Both the energy and transport route especially passing through the Eurasian States of Central Asia and Caucasus has been receiving considerable attention through the development policies of East-West corridor connections, where the Eurasian states are linked with the South & East Asia moving towards the Europe. Today, there exists plethora of regional transport network systems, such as the Black Sea Pan-European transport Area, the European cooperation initiative, Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEAC), Europe's TRACECA project and so on. However, the initial thrust for improving the trade route has been more or less in a horizontal nature along the East-West corridor.

One of the Corridors is Europe-Caucasus-Asia corridor (TRACECA). The TRACECA may be referred to as the renaissance of the great Silk route. TRACECA is the technical assistance programme for development of the transport corridor between Europe and Asia across the Black Sea. The countries of the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and the Central Asian countries are involved for the development of this corridor. The TRACECA programme was launched in May 1993, since then EU has financed 62 technical assistance and 14 investments projects.<sup>5</sup>

In September 1998, twelve countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Ukraine) signed the "Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for the Development of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia", including four supplementary technical annexes on rail and road transport and commercial maritime navigation.

TRACECA aims at supporting political and economic independence of the States by enhancing their capacity to access European and World markets through alternative transport routes, encouraging further regional co-operation among the partner countries. TRACECA helps in assisting in the development of economic relations, trade and transport communications in Europe, in the Black Sea region and in Asia. It ensures access to the world market through road and rail transport and commercial navigation, ensuring traffic security, cargo safety and environmental protection. TRACECA harmonizes the transport policy and legal structure in the field of transport and creates

<sup>1</sup> Hussain Moazzen, Lyan Iur Islam, Reza kibra, "South Asian Economic development: transformation opportunities and challenges", Routledge, London, New York, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, "from Disintegration to Reintegration: Europe and Central Asia in International Trade", 2006, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/>

<sup>3</sup> S.Polanchek, "Conflict and Trade", *Journal of Conflict resolution*, Vol. 24 (1)1980, pp.55-78.

<sup>4</sup> Wilfred J.Ethier, *Regionalism in a multilateral World*, the *Journal of Political economy*, Vol.106 (6) December, 1998, pp.1214-12145)

<sup>5</sup> Silk Road." [http://www.livius.org/sh-si/silk\\_road/silk\\_road.html](http://www.livius.org/sh-si/silk_road/silk_road.html), LIVIUS Articles of Ancient History. 28 October 2010.



good conditions for transport cooperation's. Increasingly, TRACECA is trying to attract the support of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and private investors. TRACECA desires to deliver a sustainable, efficient and integrated multimodal transport system.<sup>1</sup>

### Regional Transport Network Initiatives

Due to increase in the volume of trade and commercial interaction in the region, there are many other routes under construction and are ready to take-off and one such route is BTC Pipeline (Second longest oil pipeline of the former Soviet Union) though BTC operates mainly for connecting West with the Caucasian region, nonetheless, there is a possibility of establishing BTC's connectivity with the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline. TAPI envisaged bringing energy from Daulatabad-Herat-Kandahar-Quetta-Multan- to the North Indian State of Fazilka in Punjab. The 1700 km. length pipeline is estimated to cost 9 billion USD and has a capacity to carry 90 million metric standard cubic meters/day gas for 30 years. India and Pakistan have agreed on uniform transit fee and it seems Pakistan has mentioned that it will accept whatever India and Afghanistan agrees upon. India has also recently approved the 'Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for TAPI. The feasibility study has already been completed. India's GAIL has made an initial investment of 5 million USD. Of late, Bangladesh has also shown interest in joining the TAPI project. The minimum time expected to complete the project is approximately 4 years i.e. TAPI should start its operations by 2017. TAPI pipeline will make the regional transport system all the more complex and intricate in the Eurasian region. However, the revival of economic and trade activities will further contribute in enhancing the regional cooperation. The development of this route will connect the States of Eurasia with India more closely and in the process this will also enhance the infrastructure of the region.

The Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR) is often associated with the main trans-continental Russian Line that connects many large and small cities of the Eurasian region. The trans-Siberian Railways are also known as the spinal cord of Russia connecting Moscow with Vladivostok and is the longest railway-route in the World. It covers a record of seven time zones and takes eight days to complete the journey. It is the third longest single continuous service in the world and is in operation since 1916 and is still being expanded and modernized. The main route of the Trans-Siberian railroads begins in Moscow at Yaroslavsky Vokzal runs through Yaroslav, Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Chita and Khabarovsk to Vladivostok via Southern Siberia. The construction of TSR was started in the year 1891 and was complete in the year 1916 and for decades it has been the principle railway link between European Russia and its industrial regions towards the East i.e. Urals- (most part of Urals lies in Russia and also some part of the Ural region lies in north western Kazakhstan) -Barnaul Altai-Khakassia-Tuva-Irkutsk-Buryatia-Chita.<sup>2</sup> The TSR is 9,288 km long and was fully electrified by the year 2002. Its several lines in the far eastern section are linked with China, North Korea and with the Mongoli's railways connections. It is also well connected with the Central Asian railways and with the Western European railways via Belarus. At present the TSR is technically capable of carrying 250–300 thousand equivalent units (TEU's) of the international transit cargoes per-annum. However, it is expected that once the modernisation of the TSR is complete and if the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) railway starts functioning then this figure will increase by 1 million TEU's per annum. Russian railways have already thought of investing 50 billion rubles i.e. 1.5 billion for the modernisation process of TSR till 2015, primarily to allow it to handle special container traffic.

Another significant development is taking place in the region is on the Kazakh-Chinese pipeline construction work in the east. This is also China's first direct oil import pipeline from Central Asia, notwithstanding the huge volume of plying truck trade between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Recently, India has also struck the deal with Afghanistan to exploit the iron ores in the Hajigak mines of Afghanistan, which is estimated to be around 1–3 trillion USD, therefore, now India is also showing keenness to develop the connectivity and linkages with Afghanistan for easy accessibility and improving connectivity. India has already invested around 136 million USD to link Chabahar port of Iran to link roads in Afghanistan. India has also developed a new highway Zaranj-Delaram Highway in Afghanistan linking this route with Afghanistan's renewed ring road at Herat. India has also proposed to join the project of connecting Iran's Banzar-Anzali on the Caspian coast to Russia.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of such large stakes, India is forthright in developing its connectivity through transport corridors for overcoming its biggest drawback of the lack of connectivity.

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/transport/traceca\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/transport/traceca_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, "from Disintegration to re-integration: Europe and Central Asia in International Trade", 2006, available at <http://www.worldbank.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Ash Narain Roy, "A corridor of Prosperity", available at [www.hardnewsmedia.com](http://www.hardnewsmedia.com)

### Asian Highway Network

The Asian Highway Network is a network of 141,000 kilometers of standardized roadways crisscrossing 32 Asian countries linking Europe. The Asian Highway project was initiated in the year 1959 with the aim of promoting the development of international road transport in the region. During the first phase of the project (1960–1970) considerable progress was achieved, however, progress slowed down when financial assistance was suspended in 1975.<sup>1</sup> In 1980s and 1990s, regional political and economic changes spurred new momentum for the Asian Highway Project. It became one of the three pillars of Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project, endorsed by ESCAP Commission at its forty-eight session in 1992, comprising of Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway and for facilitation of the land transport projects.<sup>2</sup>

The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network was adopted on 18 November 2003, by an inter-governmental meeting held in Bangkok. This was open for signature in April 2004 in Shanghai and entered into force on 4th July 2005. A total of US\$26 billion has already been invested for the improvement and upgradation of the Asian Highway network. UNESCAP secretariat is now working with the member countries to identify financial sources for the development of network to improve the road transport capacity and efficiency.<sup>3</sup>

### International North South Corridor (INSTC)

The North-South Transport Corridor is a term used to describe the ship, rail, and road route for moving freight from South Asia to Europe through Central Asia, the Caucasus and Russia. The route primarily involves moving goods from India via ship to Iran. From Iran, the freight moves by ship across the Caspian Sea or by truck or rail to Southern Russia. From there, the goods are transported by truck or rail along the Volga River through Moscow to Northern Europe.<sup>4</sup> In 2001, Russia, Iran and India signed an agreement to further develop the route. India has taken a major step in arranging the meeting of the countries including Iran, Russia and the countries of Central Asia as well as Bulgaria to push the idea of this project and its implementation. Currently, the project includes countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus and Oman, besides the countries mentioned earlier. One of the major partners in this project is Iran.<sup>5</sup> However, the political differences between the countries did not deter the intention of India or other interested partners in this project to continue with this project for its success.

India's active interest to pursue the project is due to variety of considerations. Indian goods reach Russia and Central Asia travelling through long routes of Suez Canal. This project envisages a multi-modal transportation network that connects ports on India's west coast to Bandar Abbas in Iran, then overland to Bandar Anzali port on the Caspian Sea. Through Rasht and Astara on the Azerbaijan border onwards to Kazakhstan and further towards Russia and through Mediterranean to the Ukrainian ports of Odessa and Kiev and then onwards to Russia and Central Asia. This route also has the rail connectivity of about 200 km from Iran to the Caspian Sea. This network can be further expanded to Europe and towards the South East Asia.<sup>6</sup> The new route will reduce transport cost and travel time to a significant extent. While the Suez Canal route takes about 45–60 days, the Iran route will take about 25–30 days. The India-Russia-Iran cordial relationship is likely to help in realising this project in expected time. Another reason why India is interested to pursue this route via Iran is due to India's non-friendly relationship with Pakistan and the turmoil in Afghanistan.

The larger implications of the North-South corridor, which has also other branches such as the route linking Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan or the route linking Afghanistan and Uzbekistan both of which can be linked to this corridor, will have wider significance for the region. It will help in opening-up the vast markets in India, Russia and Central Asia and in other parts of Asia and Europe too. The Customs Union of the countries of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus can be further expanded and linked to other countries of Eurasia as well as to India in order to have wider economic entity, which can use this transport corridor for easy and better connectivity.<sup>7</sup> This energy rich region with vast geography

<sup>1</sup> Ulric Killion, *A Modern Chinese Journey to the West: Economic Globalization and Dualism*, (Nova Science Publishers: 2006), p.66

<sup>2</sup> United Nation development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report, 2994: Cultural library in today's diverse world*, UNDP, New York 2004.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/index.asp?menuname=asianhighway>

<sup>4</sup> Waugh, Daniel. (2007), «Richthofen's «Silk Roads: Toward the Archaeology of a Concept.» *The Silk Road. Volume 5, Number 1, Summer 2007*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank: *trade and transport facilitation in Central Asia: Reducing the economic distance to markets*, Final draft Report, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *Times of India* of 13 March 2012.

<sup>7</sup> *Russia-India Report Publication, Moscow, 2012.*

and with vast resources is expected to play a crucial role in the emerging new great game in the post-Soviet Eurasian space. The politico-economic dimension of this route will be significant in the international political scenario with the indications of shift in the global power base.

The North-South Corridor will help to develop a web of bilateral infrastructure for trade routes in the region and for the flow of goods and people, otherwise impeded at the borders due to the lack of bilateral and multi-lateral agreements. It will finally reduce down the transportation costs, otherwise creates big hindrance which stem from variances in technical and legal requirements such as vehicle weights, dimensions and operating permits, inconsistent documentation and inspections etc. The rail corridor connecting Northern Europe (with Helsinki as the reference point of origin) with ports in the Persian Gulf (with Bandar Abbas as the reference destination port) is the backbone for a distinctive distance advantage over the existing shipping route. The Helsinki to Bandar Abbas distance by sea is around 7,217 nautical miles, i.e. 13,366 km.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the corridor would nearly reduce the distance by half.

The countries concerned would have to define a set of common technical standards and make available the necessary financial resources to implement them so that there is a speedy activation of movement. Sufficient resources are to be allocated to ensure the least possible level of impediment for smooth operation of transit. Currently the only existing continuous all-rail, operation between Helsinki and Bandar Abbas is via Central Asian route through Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, (7,549-km) long route via Taxiatah or the (7,885-km) long route via Nukuss. The Caspian Sea route is the shortest of all routes within the corridors.<sup>2</sup>

The Eurasian States have shown keen interest in opening-up the network of routes in the region. President of Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan during their visits to India emphasized for increasing cooperation and connectivity between the regional countries. As close network and linkages can bring the countries of the region in mutually beneficial framework and will also have the potential to reduce the rivalry between them. In today's geo-political scenario better connectivity and better trade and economic relationship is extremely important. Opening-up of the north-south corridor will certainly facilitate this prospect and bring the powers of the region together and increase mutual understanding and cooperation.

## Conclusion

Revival of the Silk route connectivity and development of the transport corridors and improving the linkages will increase the regional cooperation and can be considered as a major tool for transport and trade developments. There is a major developed market that surrounds these lands locked countries of Eurasia, which can be connected easily through these viable routes. Regional cooperation agreement helps in removing many potential obstacles. Transport Corridors can indeed contribute significantly in developing trade and transit among the regional Countries. The significance of the transport corridor developing in the region would be to provide a platform to improve cooperation as well as the communications and reduce barriers to permit the economies of each country to grow independently and achieve objectives for the benefit of the country and the region as a whole.

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