

India hosts first meeting on Chabahar Port development with Central Asian nations

The first meeting of the India-Central Asia Joint Working Group on Chabahar was held on April 12-13, 2023 in Mumbai. The two-day meet, which began on Wednesday, was one of the key outcomes of the Delhi Declaration of the first India Central Asia summit held in January last year. The participants of the meeting include India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Special invitees include Iran and the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP).

One of the key issues being discussed at the meeting is the development of the Shahid Beheshti Terminal (SBT) and the usage of the Chabahar port by the Central Asian countries. The expectations of the participating countries are also being discussed at the meeting.

The Chabahar port is strategically located in the southeastern Iranian city of Chabahar (Persian for 'four springs') and has emerged as a commercial transit hub for the region. India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement in May 2016 to establish the International Transport and Transit Corridor (Chabahar Agreement). India is participating in the development of the first phase of the Shahid Beheshti Terminal, Chabahar Port, in cooperation with Iran.

India has committed a total grant assistance of \$85 million and a credit facility of \$150 million for the development of the SBT. As part of its commitment towards infrastructure development of the SBT, India has supplied six mobile harbour cranes (two 140 tonnes and four 100 tonnes capacity) and other equipment worth \$25 million.

Since taking over the operations of the Chabahar Port in December 2018, India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) through its wholly owned subsidiary, India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ), has handled 215 vessels, 16,000 TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Units), and four million tonnes of bulk and general cargo as per the latest data given to the Indian parliament.

The Chabahar Port has provided much-needed sea access to the landlocked countries of the region, including Afghanistan, and has become a more economical and stable route for landlocked countries of the region to reach India and the global market. To date, a total of 2.5 million tonnes of wheat and 2,000 tonnes of pulses have been trans-shipped from India to Afghanistan through the Chabahar Port.

The port has also facilitated the supply of humanitarian assistance, especially, during the COVID-19

pandemic. India has utilised the Chabahar port to ship 75,000 MTs of wheat as humanitarian food assistance to Afghanistan in 2020. In 2021, India supplied 40,000 litres of environment-friendly pesticides to Iran to fight the locust menace

The India Central Asia Joint Working Group on Chabahar meeting is expected to further strengthen India's connectivity focus with the Central Asian countries and Iran. The development of the Chabahar port and its usage by the participating countries is expected to increase economic and trade opportunities for the region

The meeting was attended by the Deputy Foreign Ministers of India and the Islamic Republic of Iran, representatives of the transport sector and the Ambassadors of the Central Asian countries, the representative of United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP), the Managing Director of Chabahar Free Trade - Industrial Zone, and the Consul General of Afghanistan in Mumbai

Following the meeting, the delegations adopted a Joint Declaration

