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**Turkey-India relations
Amid global challenges**

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Turkey-India relations have witnessed many twists and turns since the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the G20 summit in Antalya in 2015.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited India in May 2017. Turkey has taken a strong stance on the Kashmir issue, the Citizenship Amendment Act in India, and anti-Muslim violence in New Delhi in 2020. India took strong exception to the Turkish president's 2019 speech at the United Nations and protested against Erdoğan's references to Kashmir during an address to the joint session of Pakistan's parliament last year.

Despite uneasy political relations between India and Turkey, however, bilateral trade, business ventures and tourism have seen significant growth.

Growing Tourism

Trade, tourism and investment figures indicate that setbacks in political relations have not affected the relations in other key sectors.

Trade and tourism are expected to grow further in the coming years. Even after political acrimony following India's abrogation of Kashmir's autonomy, some 100,000 Indian tourists visited Turkey from August to December 2019. The overall 2019 figures suggest that political frictions did not hit Indian tourist arrivals in Turkey. According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2019 showed a 57 per cent increase in Indian tourists. Turkey received 230,000 Indian visitors in 2019 compared to 147,000 in 2018.

Though Indian tourist arrivals registered a high growth, it is still a small portion of Turkey's 51.9 million foreign tourists in 2019. Turkey has emerged as a popular destination for Indian leisure tourists, weddings and business conferences.

Turkish locations and facilities are particularly attractive to Indian wedding planners. The country hosted a record \$32 million worth of Indian weddings in 2019.

Bilateral trade and investments

Turkey focused on Western markets for decades, but has now begun to look at Asia for new foreign trade opportunities. India is among the countries to which Turkey is projected to increase its exports and reduce trade deficit.

Turkey and India have a steady pace of expansion in their bilateral trade and two-way investments. However, as G-20 members their potential to increase business relations is tremendous. Bilateral trade grew of 22 per cent and reached \$8.7 billion in 2018. Turkey's exports to India totalled \$1.2 billion, while its imports from India were valued at \$7.5 billion in 2018.

The Indian market provides attractive opportunities to Turkish investors to diversify their portfolio and to use it as a hub for operations in Asia. Turkish firms from the construction sector, the glass manufacturer Sisecam, and the home appliance and consumer electronics maker Arçelik are active in India.

The Voltbek Home Appliances venture between Tata-owned Voltas and Turkey's Koc Group entity Arçelik has plans to expand to overseas markets with products either under its own brand Voltas Beko or act as a worldwide production hub for Koc Group.

Sisecam bought 99.8 per cent stake in India's HNG Float Glass Limited. The Turkish firm Savronik was responsible for the electromechanical work in the construction of the strategically important 9-km-long Manali-Leh Atal Tunnel, which was recently inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Savronik's Indian subsidiary Savronik India system Pvt Ltd has also completed railway and road tunnel projects in that country.

In June 2019, Turkey's TAIS Shipyards emerged as the lowest bidder following a global competition for a contract to manufacture five of the 45, 0000-tonne fleet support vessels for

the Indian Navy at the Vizag-based Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL). After several reports of cancellation of the \$ 2.3 billion naval deal, it finally sailed through the political squabbling and the two countries signed this important defence deal.

Pakistan, Kashmir and Indian initiatives

Kashmir emerged as the main obstacle and point of conflict in enhancing friendly ties between the two countries. Turkey was among four countries - alongside China, Pakistan and Malaysia - that internationalized the Kashmir issue at the gathering of the world leaders at the United Nations. Modi met with leaders of Armenia, Greek Cyprus and Greece, countries with which Turkey does not entertain cordial relations, in an attempt to convey India's displeasure with Ankara.

Following the Turkish president's UN General Assembly speech in September 2019, India came up with its own set of stringent actions that affected its bilateral relations with Turkey. Just after Erdoğan's speech, Modi met the Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades on the side lines of the UNGA. In the meeting, India reiterated its support for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Republic of Cyprus (South Cyprus).

In October 2019, India issued a travel advisory to its citizens visiting Turkey during the Turkish military operation in northern Syria. India also criticized the operation as a "unilateral military offensive". In early March last year India signed a deal worth \$40 million to supply four weapon-locating "Swathi" radars to Armenia. These radars are built by the state-owned Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

It is a fact that the growing closeness between Turkey and Pakistan within the changing geopolitics has its effect on the relations between India and Turkey.

Aside from the Kashmir issue, Ankara has insisted on Pakistan's membership within the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) if India joins the group. Thanks to Turkish support alongside Malaysia and China's backing, Pakistan has avoided getting blacklisted by the France-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF). India has campaigned for Pakistan's blacklisting.

Pakistan has also been showing profound interest in getting Turkey to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). If this happens, then Turkey can become a serious hub for the CPEC and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India's outward refusal to join the CPEC and BRI are already well-known.

The growing military cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan makes India uncomfortable. Turkey's SSM is upgrading the Pakistan Navy's French-built Agosta submarines, building warships and Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) is building T129 attack helicopters for the Pakistan Air Force. Pakistan's Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT) manufactures Turkish Firtina howitzers under licence. Turkey ordered Pakistan-built 52 Super Mushak basic trainer aircraft. Pakistan is additionally looking to acquire Turkish armed drones. Turkey donated 32 T138 talon intermediate jet trainers to Pakistan.

India's growing bonhomie with Greek Cyprus, Armenia and Greece is unlikely to discourage Turkey as it has been dealing with the irritants in its neighbourhood through persuasive diplomatic challenges from the US, Russia, France and Germany. However, at the moment it appears that neither India nor Turkey want to vitiate bilateral business relations, trade environment and cultural ties due to political differences.