

**Concept Note**

International Conference

**‘India and the Silk Road: Exploring Opportunities in Contemporary Geopolitical Realities’**

Date: *17-18 February 2016*

Organised by  
MMAJ Academy of International Studies,  
Jamia Millia Islamia,  
New Delhi (110025) INDIA

The proposed International conference is an attempt to put into perspective the dynamics of the historical Silk Road as well as the contemporary geopolitical realities and to provide a realistic assessment of its importance from India's point of view. In the recent year, in the region of Central Asia and its neighbourhood there has been a growing competition for the revival of the historical 'Silk Road'. This network of trade route which has existed for centuries crisscrossed many continental landmarks. Today, the reality of this historical Silk Road is re-emerging in a new geopolitical context, with the potential for shared prosperity among the states connected within this route. The new Silk Road of the 21<sup>st</sup> century covers almost all modes of communication infrastructure and transportation including road network, rail and oil and gas pipeline.

The 'Silk Road' or Silk Route, a name given in the mid-nineteenth century by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, to the region, is the world's oldest and most historically important trade route and it has had its influences on the cultures of India, Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian countries. The Silk Road was actually based on a network of roads generally connecting East and West, linking the area of Southern Iran, the northern Eurasian steppe and south over the Hindu Kush to the Indian Subcontinent. With the emergence of independent republics in Central Asia in the beginning of the 1990s and their eventual quest for establishing trade, commerce and overall relations with the outside world, *it became pertinent for India to deliberate upon the revival of the historical Silk Road.*

Since its origins as a notion, the Silk Road has captured and captivated our imagination. The recent revival of the Silk Road, from an Indian point of view, will help trade and stability in the new Central Asian states. It will open the way for India to revive its links with them. This route was not only a road for carrying on trade and transportation of merchandise but also means of cultural exchange which led to the increasing familiarization of India with Central

Asia. It was this road which was used by our Indian missionaries to reach China in ancient days. Many cultural ideas travelled to and fro on this road.

In past India was linked with Central Asia through four major overland caravan routes. One route from India to Central Asia was through Kashmir, Ladakh and the Sinkiang provinces of China, and three other routes to Central Asia passed through Afghanistan. Of the latter three routes one led from the Kashmir valley to Leh to Yarkand and from Yarkand to Kashghar then to *Farghana* valley or on to Kokand; the second exit point was Kabul where traders, principally from the Punjab generally known as *Lahoris*, assembled before going on to Balkh. This was the most common route and led to Central Asia via Bamian, Tashkurgan, **Mazar-i-Sharif** and then across the Amu Darya. The third exit point for Indian traders was Multan. From Multan the Merchants would generally march to Kandahar in Afghanistan from ancient time India and China were linked through the historical Nathu-la Pass. Recently China and India have reopened the Nathu-la Pass, which also signifies rising trade demand between two countries.

The conference will have a special focus on India. It will attempt to put into perspective the dynamics of the historical Silk Road and to provide a realistic assessment of its importance from India's point of view. When we talk about contemporary opportunities some fundamental questions occur in our mind like: what was the 'mode of transportation', will those cities, which flourished along the route, revive? Cities along these trade routes grew rich providing services to merchants and acting as international marketplaces. Can that route/routes be mapped and surveyed for building new roads, railway etc? How can tourism be promoted along the route? The objective of this conference is to raise and analyse these questions and to further encourage efforts to revive the Silk Road by bringing together experts in the area to discuss this.

**Some of hampering factors of the Revival of the land Route with Central Asia cannot be overlooked and need our attention like:-**

- É Geographical location: high mountain ranges and difficult passage.
- É Closed economic policy in some of Central Asian Republics
- É Political instability in Afghanistan
- É Uncertainty in India ó Pakistan relation

We are not connected directly through road-link with Central Asia but thorough Pakistan or China. We have a cumbersome way of linking to Central Asia through Iran. That has also not

been easy and slow as a result of the sanctions on Iran. Now with the possibility of the lifting of sanctions, we can play an aggressive role in connecting to the Silk Road even if Pakistan is not obliging.

In this backdrop, the proposed conference will endeavour to examine the potential of India's trade via the Silk Road. We would try to estimate the prospects of the revival of this road with a parallel analysis of how the new equations will help to foster commerce and trade by providing a safe and short passage to reach Central Asian and neighbouring countries. To discuss this exciting subject, the Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia (a Central University), proposes to organise a two-day International Conference on **India and the Silk Road: Exploring Opportunities in Contemporary Geopolitical Realities** on *17-18 February 2016*, at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi India. The conference will bring together a group of distinguished scholars from India, Central Asia and other parts of the world.

Papers are invited from social scientists drawn from different disciplines such as International Relations, history, sociology, political science, anthropology etc. on the following major broad themes:

- Historical Aspects of the Silk Road
- Major linkages of the Silk Road
- Silk Road and Economic Development
- Central Asian Interest in the New Silk Road
- Silk Road and New Great Game, China as a Factor
- Religion along the Silk Road

Please send in the title and a 200-word abstract by 30 December 2015 to [nrkhan@jmi.ac.in](mailto:nrkhan@jmi.ac.in) or [nrazakhan@gmail.com](mailto:nrazakhan@gmail.com)

- **Last date for sending abstract:** 30 December 2015
- **Confirmation of acceptance:** 15 January 2016
- **Last date for submission of full paper:** 31 January 2016

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