

## **Kazakhstan-India relations: new horizons**

Kazakhstan's geographical location at the cross-roads of the multi-modal corridors traversing from the East to West and North to South makes it geo-strategically the most important country in the Central Asian Region. Its landmass, high population and high GDP in the region reinforced by rich natural resources add to the strategic stature of the country. Its multi-ethnic culture, multi-linguistic diversity and secular outlook resonate well with Indian values and outlook.

It has been only two decades since the emergence of Kazakhstan as an independent nation but within this short period it has become very active in contributing towards peace and security building efforts. It is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization; is also a Partner for Peace programme of NATO and its armed forces have taken part in several joint exercises with the member countries of these organizations/groupings. The key security concerns of Kazakhstan do not emanate from its major neighbours like Russia or China with which it has cooperative relationship through bilateral mechanisms and multilateral platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization but from other sources in the region.

There are several areas of congruence between the armed forces and the defence industry of Kazakhstan and India which can be exploited for mutual benefit. Both armed forces are predominantly equipped with Russian origin equipment and it is in this field that some cooperation has already taken place and more can take place. Both armed forces are modernizing and India has plans to acquire several billions dollars worth of defence equipment. India is also giving boost to its defence industry and is looking for joint ventures in defence production. Further, the Indian armed forces are one of the most battle tested and experienced armed forces due to its participation in many battles and wars since independence. In the area of counter-insurgency and anti-terrorist operations the Indian armed forces have over six decades of experience. The above is reinforced by the experience gained during UN peace keeping operations for which the Indian military has been sending one of the largest contingents for such operations.

Thus Indo-Kazakh defence cooperation would be of immense value to both the nations in the emerging defence and strategic environment.