

Uzbek President arriving today

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30. The President of Uzbekistan, Mr. Islam Karimov, arrives here tomorrow amid mounting security concerns in Central Asia over terrorism and religious extremism, radiating out of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

His two-day visit is being seen here as part of the new diplomatic effort in Central Asia to build a broad international coalition, including India, to isolate the radical forces being nurtured by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Led by Uzbekistan, the Central Asian Republics are increasing security cooperation among themselves and reaching out to Russia, China, India and the U.S. to combat the new threats of terrorism, emanating from their southern border with Afghanistan.

Mr. Karimov, who will meet the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Tuesday, is

expected to enlist India's support in countering the threats to peace and stability in politically fragile Central Asia.

Given their converging security perceptions, there is a strong possibility that India and Uzbekistan will begin to institutionalise cooperation between their security establishments in dealing with the threats from extremism.

Shaken by a series of recent terrorist attacks, Presidents of the four Central Asian States — Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Krygyzstan and Kazakhstan — met in Tashkent on April 21 to sign a security pact to jointly combat terrorism, political and religious extremism and transnational organised crime. After signing the pact, Mr. Karimov cited Afghanistan as the "main source of fanaticism and extremism in the region." He also said, "we have found ourselves exposed to a powerful ideological expansion."

The major powers are competing with each other to assist the Central Asian nations in their war against terrorism. Russia is now more assertive and has signalled a very tough policy against the Taliban. China, confronted with religious extremism in Xinjiang, has also increased its political cooperation.

The U.S., while being critical of the human rights record of the Central Asian Governments, has backed the anti-terrorist effort with its economic and technical assistance. It is also convening a Central Asian Counter-terrorism conference in Washington in June. A number of top American officials have visited Central Asia in the last few weeks.

They include the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. George Tenet, the Director of the FBI, Mr. Louis Freeh, and the Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright.

THE HINDU

1 MAY 2000

Indo-Uzbek road map to fight terrorism

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. With terrorism from Afghanistan knocking on its door, Uzbekistan's President, Mr. Islam Karimov, arrived here tonight to finalise with India, a road-map to combat this menace.

The two sides, during Mr. Karimov's three-day trip, will sign nine agreements, most of which aim to underpin a common political understanding to counter common threats to their security.

India and Uzbekistan are aware that the spill-over of terrorism from the Afghan hub has larger geopolitical ramifications. The spread of religious extremism towards Uzbekistan, for instance, can destabilise resource-rich Central Asia. For India, the security implications are also negative as the consolidation of radicalism in Afghanistan will harden extremist pressures on Kashmir. Afghanistan today is the nucleus from where insurgences are fanning out in the direction of Central and South Asia. Its ripple effects are felt as far as the Caucasus mountains, acutely affecting Russia.

Given the high stakes, New Delhi and Tashkent, during Mr. Karimov's stay will sign a joint declaration on principles to anchor their future relationship. The far-reaching document will be signed by the visiting President and the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Tuesday.

Sources here said the two coun-

tries were in favour of launching a joint initiative to counter terrorism from Afghanistan, with an option to co-opt other like-minded countries if required. Uzbekistan senses a great urgency in formalising such a plan. Already, radical elements of the United Uzbek Opposition are converging in Kandahar — the base from where they are expected to launch a cross-border onslaught against Tashkent across the Amu Darya. Elements of the pro-Pakistan Taliban in Kandahar are also expected to join this group.

India and Uzbekistan, during Mr. Karimov's stay, will sign an extradition treaty and a legal assistance pact on criminal matters. The customs administration of the two countries will also sign a "mutual assistance" agreement.

India has decided to extend a \$ 10 million credit line to Uzbekistan to add an economic dimension to a mainly political relationship so far. Indian pharmaceutical firms, however, have now entrenched themselves in Uzbekistan.

Besides, the two countries will sign pacts in the fields of agriculture research, culture, information and mass media.

Mr. Karimov, over the next two days, will hold talks with the Prime Minister and the President. On Wednesday, he will address the Confederation of Indian Industry and address the media.

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2001

Belarus to support India's claim for UN seat: Ambassador

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 14

"WE WILL support India's claim for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council when it will be enlarged. We are renewing our pledge in this regard," said Vladimir Sakalowski, Belarus ambassador to India, here today. Sakalowski was on a courtesy visit to Calcutta during which he met Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya.

The ambassador also met Governor Viren J Shah and Speaker of the West Bengal Assembly Hasim Abdul Halim.

During his meeting with Bhattacharyya, the ambassador discussed the possibility of trade between Belarus and West Bengal. It has been decided that during the next meeting between the Belarus team and the West Bengal Government, some specific decisions regarding agricultural machinery, ball bearing and metal-cutting will be taken.

Later, speaking to *The Hindustan Times*, Sakalowski said his country



Belarus ambassador Vladimir Sakalowski

was on the verge of forming a political and economic union with Russia. "In 1992, when the former Soviet Union collapsed, independence fell on us like a ripe banana. We were not prepared for it. Gradually we have learnt to cherish it," he said. A political and economic agreement between the two countries has already been signed and ratified.

"We are doing something new. It

will be a State within which there will be two sovereign states - Russia and Belarus. We don't want to surrender our independence and sovereignty," Sakalowski said.

This union will be open to other countries, including those belonging to the former Soviet Union. The Belarus ambassador pointed out that forces in Russia and Belarus, along with a number of Western countries, were not in favour of the union. "They fear that this will be the initiation of the restoration of the Soviet Union," Sakalowski said.

Efforts are on to develop trade with India and Belarus. Though the volume is not yet significant, it was growing at a rapid pace. Belarus Republic also supports India's stand on organised crime and international terrorism.

The chairman of the Belarus' National Security Council is expected in India by the end of this month to speak to his Indian counterparts. An agreement to combat organised crime and terrorism between India and Belarus will be announced soon.

Delhi, Tashkent to discuss counter-terrorism measures

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By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, April 26. Concerned about the deteriorating regional security situation, India and Uzbekistan are getting ready for a major joint initiative to counter terrorism originating from Afghanistan. The nitty-gritty of such an arrangement is expected to be formalised during next week's visit to India by Uzbekistan's President, Mr. Islam Karimov.

Government sources here anticipate that Mr. Karimov's trip will be "primarily political" and discussions will revolve around the negative fallout of developments in Afghanistan on regional security. The joint initiative, which could later expand to include more countries, is likely to see New Delhi and Tashkent sharing more intelligence on counter-terrorism.

Uzbekistan, the sources say, is worried that it could be subjected to a militant onslaught from Kandahar in Afghanistan. Kandahar, it is said, has become the hub which has integrated the political and the radical elements of the United Uzbek Opposition. While in Afghanistan, these dissident groups are expected to be joined by the Pakistan-backed Taliban.

"The location of Kandahar for an armed thrust in Uzbekistan is interesting because the

area can be kept supplied from Quetta in Pakistan," the sources said. Not surprisingly, during the talks India is expected to impress upon Uzbekistan, Pakistan's role in radicalising Afghanistan and destabilising the region.

Uzbekistan's fears of being subverted have been further heightened on account of the Taliban's military gains in Afghanistan. With the Taliban sitting in Mazar-e-Sharif, the Uzbeks know that they can be targeted from northern Afghanistan, across the legendary Amu Darya which separates the two countries.

Cross-border terrorism has already found an expression in Tashkent, underscoring the urgency for joint counter-measures. Mr. Karimov escaped an assassination attempt in February last and Tashkent was subjected to serial bomb blasts which, insiders say, killed around 200 people.

Attempts to stabilise Uzbekistan's other Central Asian neighbours, including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have also galvanised Tashkent to take on the menace of terrorism head-on without any further delay.

India shares Uzbekistan's concerns on terrorism. The steady seepage of militants from Afghanistan into Kashmir has become cause for serious concern in New Delhi. The hijack-

ing of the Indian Airlines plane to Kandahar has enhanced anxieties about the use of the Afghan bridgehead for subversion into Central and South Asia.

Mr. Karimov's visit to India comes at a time when the Russian profile in countering internal security threats in Central Asia has enlarged. Russia, along with four Central Asian republics — Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — has been holding regular military exercises, including 'Southern Shield-2000' to counter terrorism.

Sources pointed out that the Russians are in no mood to scale down their 30,000 troops which are already guarding the frontline in Tajikistan. The Central Asians, analysts say, are rediscovering Russia as their main ally in the region after Moscow's military thrust in Chechnya and Mr. Vladimir Putin's emergence at the helm.

Russia's prominence in Central Asia has also galvanised a fresh diplomatic initiative by Washington in the region. The U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, was in Central Asia last week to shore up Washington's flagging economic and political relationship in this zone.