

Perhaps the most significant of Modi's foreign trips

Given the clout the Gwadar port in Pakistan gave China in the region, the foothold India has got by inking an agreement with Iran to develop the Chabahar port is of great significance, making it perhaps the most successful overseas visit by prime minister [Narendra Modi](#). The Chabahar agreement, of course, brings many other positives like working together with Iran on combating terrorism, radicalism and drug trafficking—there are also the billions of dollars of investment opportunities in areas like gas-based fertiliser and petrochemicals plants in an Iran which is no longer an international pariah following its nuclear deal and is keen to work with a country that stood by it during its worst days. And even prior to the visit, India and Iran have been working on finalising the commercial terms—to be done by October—for ONGC to take control of part of the gas-rich Farzad B field. Though the traditional contractors in all such deals such as the one to build the Afghanistan parliament are government-owned companies, perhaps the delays in that project will convince Modi to use private sector firms that are used to delivering on time.

The trilateral connectivity pact signed by India, Iran and Afghanistan, of course, was even more important since this opens up a gateway to central Asia while bypassing Pakistan completely. The three-nation transport and transit corridor also involves construction of Chabahar-Zahedan railway line in Iran with India providing support for this part also. Once complete, it will connect the Chabahar port by rail to Zahedan in Iran, and then to Zaranj in Afghanistan, extending up to Delaram, which is also in Afghanistan. This would ensure that Afghan goods coming to Zahedan can be transported by the rail link to Chabahar and shipped to India, without getting impacted by the disturbances in a militarised Pakistan. And when this corridor is linked to the multimodal transport arrangement through the International North-South Transport Corridor, it will connect South Asia with Europe. As Afghan president Ashraf Ghani said at the signing of the agreement, “We wanted to prove that geography is not our destiny ... with our will, we can change our geography”. With the route to central Asia opening up without Pakistan in the middle, geography may truly become history.