

## Central Asia

### Section 1



#### MAIN IDEAS

1. Key physical features of landlocked Central Asia include rugged mountains.
2. Central Asia has a harsh, dry climate that makes it difficult for vegetation to grow.
3. Key natural resources in Central Asia include water, oil and gas, and minerals.

## Key Terms and Places

**landlocked** completely surrounded by land with no direct access to the ocean

**Pamirs** some of Central Asia's high mountains

**Fergana Valley** large fertile valley in the plains region of Central Asia

**Kara-Kum** desert in Turkmenistan

**Kyzyl Kum** desert in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan

**Aral Sea** sea that is actually a large lake, which is shrinking due to irrigation

## Section Summary

### PHYSICAL FEATURES

Central Asia, the middle part of the continent, is **landlocked**. In the region's east, there are rugged, high mountains. Large glaciers are common in the high mountains. One area of high mountains is called the **Pamirs**.

Because it is landlocked and has such rugged land, Central Asia is isolated. Communication and travel are difficult. The area also has many earthquakes.

From the mountains, the land slowly slopes down to the Caspian Sea in the west. Some land there is 95 feet (29 m) below sea level. The land between the sea and mountains is plains and plateaus. The fertile **Fergana Valley** is in the plains.

Central Asia also has some rivers and lakes. Two important rivers are the Syr Darya (sir durh-YAH) and the Amu Darya (uh-MOO duhr-YAH).

**What two factors make Central Asia isolated?**

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**Underline the sentence that names two important rivers in Central Asia.**

**Section 1, continued**

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They make the Fergana Valley fertile. The rivers flow into the Aral Sea, which is really a large lake. Lake Balkhash is also an important lake. It has freshwater at one end and salty water at the other.

**Circle the name of the sea that is really a large lake.**

**CLIMATE AND VEGETATION**

Most of Central Asia has a harsh, dry climate. Temperatures range from very cold to very hot, and there is not much rain. It is hard for plants to grow.

The mountain peaks are cold, dry, and windy. There are harsh desert areas between the mountains and sea. Two major deserts are the **Kara-Kum** and **Kyzyl Kum**. The deserts do have some sources of water. Some areas have rivers crossing them, which lets people live there. This lets people irrigate, or supply water to the land.

**Underline the names of two major deserts in Central Asia.**

Only the far north of Central Asia has a milder climate. Grasses and trees are able to grow there.

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

Some of Central Asia's natural resources are water, oil, and gas. There is also a supply of minerals, such as gold, lead, and copper.

**List some of Central Asia's natural resources:**

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People use the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers to irrigate and make electricity. But water is limited. This has led to conflicts over how to use it. Also, irrigation has kept the rivers from flowing into the **Aral Sea**. As a result, the sea has lost much of its water.

Oil and gas can only help the region if the countries can sell it. There are no ocean ports to transport it, so they need to build and maintain pipelines. But this is hard because of the rugged land, as well as economic and political problems.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Analyzing Information** Write a fact sheet called *Central Asia: Tips for Travelers*. Include key facts that travelers to the region should know and a list of supplies they should bring.

## Central Asia

### Section 2



#### MAIN IDEAS

1. Throughout history, many different groups have conquered Central Asia.
2. Many different ethnic groups and their traditions influence culture in Central Asia.

## Key Terms and Places

**Samarqand** city along the Silk Road that grew rich from trade

**nomads** people who move often from place to place

**yurt** moveable round house made of wool felt mats hung over a wood frame

## Section Summary

### HISTORY

For hundreds of years, many groups of people came through Central Asia. They left lasting influences.

At one time, there were two trade routes through Central Asia. One route went between Europe and India, through Afghanistan. The other route went through the rest of Central Asia. It was called the Silk Road, because traders from Europe traveled it to get silk and spices from China. **Samarqand** and other cities on the Silk Road grew rich.

By 1500, Europeans stopped using these roads. They discovered they could sail to East Asia on the Indian Ocean. The region became isolated and poor.

The Silk Road brought many people into Central Asia. In AD 500, Turkic-speaking nomads came from northern Asia. From the 700s to 1200s, Arabs ruled. They brought their religion, Islam. Then the Mongols conquered Central Asia. After the Mongols, groups such as the Uzbeks, Kazaks, and Turkmen came in.

In the mid-1800s, Russia conquered this region. Russians built railroads. They also increased oil and cotton production. But people began to resist Russia's rule. After the Soviets took power in Russia, they wanted to weaken resistance to their rule. So

**What places did the two trade routes in Central Asia connect?**

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**Underline the reason that Europeans stopped using the trade routes.**

**Circle the dates that the Arabs ruled Central Asia.**

**Section 2, continued**

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they divided Central Asia into republics. They also encouraged ethnic Russians to move in. The Soviets also built huge irrigation projects for more cotton production. In 1991, the Soviet government collapsed. Central Asia's republics became independent countries.

**What happened to Asia's republics when the Soviet government collapsed in 1991?**

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**CULTURE**

The people who came through Central Asia brought new languages, religions, and ways of life. These mixed with traditional ways.

For centuries, Central Asians raised herds of horses, cattle, goats, and sheep. Many lived as **nomads**. They moved their herds to different pastures in summer and winter. They also moved their houses. The Central Asian nomad's moveable house is called a **yurt**. It is an important symbol today. Even people in cities put up yurts for special events. Nomads are still common in Kyrgyzstan.

**Unscramble these letters to identify a feature of nomad life: tury. Write your answer:**

\_\_\_\_\_

Today, most of the region's ethnic groups are part of the larger Turkic group. There are ethnic Russians, also. Each group speaks its own language. Some countries have many languages. In some countries Russian is still the official language, because of earlier Russian rule. The Russians also brought Cyrillic, their alphabet. Now most countries use the Latin alphabet, the one for writing English.

**Circle the name of the Russian alphabet.**

The region's main religion is Islam, but there are also others. Some people are Russian Orthodox, a Christian religion. Today, many religious buildings that were closed by the Soviets have opened again.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Conclusions** What would Central Asia be like today if the Silk Road was still in use? Write a travel journal entry for a trip along the Silk Road describing who and what you saw.

## Central Asia

### Section 3



#### MAIN IDEAS

1. The countries of Central Asia are working to develop their economies and to improve political stability in the region.
2. The countries of Central Asia face issues and challenges related to the environment, the economy, and politics.

## Key Terms and Places

**Taliban** radical Muslim group that arose in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s

**Kabul** capital of Afghanistan

**dryland farming** farming that relies on rainfall instead of irrigation

**arable** suitable for growing crops

## Section Summary

### CENTRAL ASIA TODAY

Central Asia is working to recover from a history of invasions and foreign rulers. The region is trying to build more stable governments and stronger economies.

During the 1980s, Afghanistan was at war with the Soviet Union. In the mid-1990s, the **Taliban** took power. This was a radical Muslim group. It ruled most of the country, including **Kabul**, the capital. It based its laws on strict Islamic teachings. Most people disagreed with the Taliban. A terrorist group based in Afghanistan attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. As a result, U.S. and British forces toppled the Taliban government. Now people in Afghanistan have a constitution and more freedom. But some groups still threaten violence.

Kazakhstan was the first area in Central Asia that Russia conquered. It still has many Russian influences. Its economy suffered when the Soviet Union fell. But it is growing again, because of oil reserves and a free market. Kazakhstan has a stable democratic government. People elect a president and parliament.

**What group ruled Afghanistan from the mid-1990s to 2001?**

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**Underline the sentence that explains why Kazakhstan's economy is growing.**

**Section 3, continued**

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In Kyrgystan, many people farm. They irrigate or use **dryland farming**. This does not bring much money, but tourism may help the economy. In recent years, there have been government protests.

Tajikistan now has a more stable government, after ending conflicts between different groups. Today, the economy relies on cotton farming. But only about 5 or 6 percent of the land is **arable**.

Turkmenistan's president is elected for life and has all the power. The economy is based on oil, gas, and cotton farming. The country is a desert, but it has the longest irrigation channel in the world.

Uzbekistan's president is also elected and has all the power. The economy is based on oil and cotton. The economy is stable, but not really growing.

**Why should Tajikistan look for other ways to support its economy?**

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**ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Central Asia faces challenges in three areas today: environment, economy, and politics.

The shrinking Aral Sea is a serious problem for Central Asia's environment. The seafloor is dry. Dust, salt, and pesticides blow out of it. Its environment also has leftover radiation from Soviet nuclear testing. People's health is a concern. Crop chemicals are also a problem for the environment, harming farmlands.

Central Asia's economy relies on cotton. This has hurt many of their economies. Oil and gas reserves may bring in more money one day. Today there are still challenges, such as old equipment, that need to be overcome for Central Asia's economy to grow.

Central Asia does not have widespread political stability. In some countries, people do not agree on the best kind of government. Some turn to violence or terrorism as a result.

**Underline the main challenges that Central Asia's environment faces.**

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Analyzing Information** Imagine you work for an organization that is helping Central Asia clean up its environment. Create a poster that will convince people to donate money to this cause.

# MEENA KESHWAR KAMAL

1956-1987



**HOW SHE AFFECTED THE REGION** Meena Keshwar Kamal fought for women's rights in Afghanistan. She founded the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a group that works for women's rights in politics and society.

## VOCABULARY

**fundamentalist** radical

**atmosphere** environment

**campaign** speaking out in various places

**awareness** knowledge about something



*As you read the biography below, think about the courage Meena had to speak out for women's rights in Afghan society.*

When Meena Keshwar Kamal was born in Afghanistan in 1956, King Zahir Shah was in power. He allowed women to go to school. He also gave them the right to vote.

Meena attended an all-girls school, where she became inspired to study law and work for greater equality for women. By the time she entered university in 1976, things had changed in Afghanistan. King Zahir Shah had been overthrown by his cousin. Afghanistan was losing its independence to the Soviet Union. Islamic **fundamentalist** groups began to fight against democratic reforms. They fought especially hard against women's rights. Some women attending university during this time were viciously attacked by these fundamentalists.

But this **atmosphere** did not stop Meena from speaking out for women. In 1977 she organized the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. This group worked to give the women of Afghanistan a voice in politics and in society.

In 1979, Meena began a **campaign** against Russia's control over Afghanistan. She organized meetings and demonstrations in schools. She spoke at colleges to persuade people to act. In 1981 she

launched a magazine, *Payam-e-Zan*, which means “women’s message.” Her magazine helped raise **awareness** about the way women were being treated by the Islamic fundamentalist groups.

Meena was assassinated in 1987. Some think she was killed by secret Russian police in Afghanistan. Others believe she was killed by Islamic fundamentalists. Today Meena is remembered for her courage and as a heroine for Afghan women.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Recall** How had things changed for women by the time Meena entered university?

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- 2. Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** Do you think Meena helped improve conditions for women in Afghanistan? Why or why not?

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### ACTIVITY

Create a collage that commemorates Meena’s life. Include images and words that illustrate her major accomplishments.



**Central Asia****Chapter Review****BIG IDEAS**

1. Central Asia, a dry, rugged, landlocked region, has oil and other valuable mineral resources.
2. The countries of Central Asia share similar histories and traditions, but particular ethnic groups give each country a unique culture.
3. Central Asian countries are mostly poor, but they are working to create stable governments and sound economies.

**REVIEWING VOCABULARY, TERMS, AND PLACES**

Use the description in the right column to unscramble the term or name in the box. Write the correct term or name in the space provided.

LRAA EAS

1. \_\_\_\_\_ devastated by the effects of irrigation

GAAFREN LYEVAL

2. \_\_\_\_\_ the major farming area in Central Asia

MODNAS

3. \_\_\_\_\_ People who move from place to place.

LTIBNAA

4. \_\_\_\_\_ group that ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s

BLKUA

5. \_\_\_\_\_ capital of Afghanistan

**COMPREHENSION AND CRITICAL THINKING**

Read each of the following pairs of sentences and cross out the FALSE sentence.

1. **a.** Every country in Central Asia is landlocked.  
**b.** Every country in Central Asia is landlocked, except Kazakhstan.
2. **a.** Most of Central Asia has excellent conditions for farming.  
**b.** The harsh, dry climate of Central Asia makes farming difficult.
3. **a.** Water and oil are among Central Asia's valuable resources.  
**b.** Forests and oil are among Central Asia's valuable resources.
4. **a.** Samarqand and Bukhara grew rich from trade along the Silk Road.  
**b.** Samarqand and Bukhara grew rich from digging out oil pipelines.

5. **a.** Most Central Asians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church.  
**b.** Islam, brought by the Arabs, is the main religion in Central Asia.
6. **a.** The Taliban rose to power in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s.  
**b.** The Taliban was toppled by U.S. and British forces in the mid-1990s.

**REVIEWING THEMES**

Using the lists below, determine what theme from geography they have in common.

**Themes**

location	place	human-environment interaction	movement	regions
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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. irrigation; oil pipelines; hydroelectricity
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. harsh, dry climate; rugged landscape; landlocked
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Fergana Valley; Cyrillic alphabet; Taliban
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. between Europe and India; Central Asia; 40°N, 60°E
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. nomads; Khyber Pass; Silk Road

**REVIEW ACTIVITY: POSTCARDS**

Create a series of postcards you might send if you were traveling around Central Asia. Create one postcard for each country discussed in the textbook chapter. On the front of each postcard, draw or paste a picture that illustrates a unique feature of that country. On the back of the postcard, write a short note describing the physical environment, natural resources, climate, culture, or history of that country.