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Russia-India-China Grouping: RIC

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Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs has announced that it will participate in the virtual meeting of the **Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping** scheduled to be held on 23rd June, 2020.

It can be noted that the RIC was also a platform for the first meeting between India and China in New Delhi after the end of Doklam standoff.

Key Points

- **Special Session:** This special session of the RIC has been called by the current Chair- Russia to commemorate the **75th anniversary of the victory in the second world war over Nazism** and creation of the **United Nations (24th October, 2020)**.
It will also discuss the current situation of the **global pandemic** and the challenges of global security, financial stability and RIC cooperation in that context.
- **India's Stand:** The Indian decision to go ahead with the ministerial level exchange has created an opening for de-escalation of tension along the **Line of Actual Control**.
- **China's Stand:** While confirming the participation in the meeting, China has also agreed to control the situation in the border areas.
- **Russia's Stand:** Russia indicated that it would support "**constructive dialogue**" over the tension in eastern Ladakh as Russia is trusted by both India and China

- **Regional Connectivity:**

Regional connectivity projects such as the **International North South Transport Corridor** involving India, Russia and Iran are expected to figure in the agenda.

- International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), is **multi-modal transportation** established in 2000 in St. Petersburg, by Iran, Russia and India for the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation among the Member States.
 - This corridor **connects India Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via the Islamic Republic of Iran** and then is connected to St. Petersburg and North Europe via the Russian Federation.
- **No Bilateral Issues:** However, the focus of the meeting will be on global coronavirus pandemic and no bilateral issues will be discussed.

RIC

- RIC is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as “**a counterbalance to the Western alliance.**”
- The group was founded on the basis of **ending its subservient foreign policy guided by the USA and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.**
- Together, the RIC countries occupy over 19% of the global landmass and contribute to over **33% of global GDP.**

Relevance of RIC for India

- **Strategic Balance:** Along with JAI, India would do well to give RIC the same importance. The groupings like the Quad and the JAI essentially revolve around the Indo Pacific and will confine India to being only a maritime power when it is actually both a maritime and continental power.
- **Forum for Cooperation:** Even though India, China and Russia may disagree on a number of security issues in Eurasia, there are areas where their interests converge, like, for instance, on Afghanistan. RIC can ensure stable peace in Afghanistan and by extension, in Central Asia.
Regular RIC interactions could also help the three countries **identify other issues** where they have congruent views like the volatile situation in West Asia.
- **Creation of New Order:** Contribute to creating a new economic structure for the world. The US apparently wants to break down the current economic and political order. While the existing structure is not satisfactory, the RIC could offer some suggestions which could be acceptable to the US.

- **Governance over Arctic:** With the Northern Sea Route opening up due to climate change, the RIC has a common interest in ensuring that it is not left to the West and Russia alone and that India and China also have major say in rules governing the Arctic route.
- **Other Aspects:** They could work together on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

Concerns

- India has traditionally avoided taking sides in international politics, especially between the great powers, preferring its traditional nonalignment. However, **China's hostile attitude towards India** in recent years is increasingly forcing India to confront.
- This makes it difficult to see how engagements through platforms such as RIC, are going to alter the **basic conflictual nature of relations** between India and China.
- Even though **Russia** has remained an old friend for India, it is increasingly under **stress to follow China's dictates**. E.g. earlier, it openly opposed the **Indo-Pacific concept at the Raisina Dialogue**.
- On issues such as Jammu and Kashmir, which China raised at the UN Security Council, Russia preferred taking a middle position, not supporting India's stand entirely.

Way Forward

- India is committed to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the border areas and RIC would give the platform for resolution of differences (along the Indo-China Border) through dialogue.
- Moreover, the RIC forms the core of both the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** and the BRICS as greater cooperation between China, India and Russia would lead to strengthening of both SCO and BRICS.
- The RIC is a significant multilateral grouping, because it brings together the three largest Eurasian countries which are also incidentally geographically contiguous. RIC, hence provides a worthwhile platform to discuss issues like West Asia, Afghanistan, climate change, terrorism, regional connectivity, tensions on Korean Peninsula, etc.

Source: TH