

# Gist of RSTV Big Picture: Russia-India-China Virtual Meet

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**What's in the News?**

- A special, foreign minister level meeting of the trilateral group: Russia-India-China (RIC) was held through video conferencing on 23rd June, 2020.
- Indian External Affairs Minister- S. Jaishankar, Chinese Foreign Minister- Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Affairs Minister - Sergey Lavrov, took part in the meeting.
- The initial remarks of the three foreign ministers were telecasted live, post which they moved on to hold 'closed-door' discussions.
- This special meeting was held to mark 75 years of the victory of Allied Powers over the Axis powers, marking the end of the Second World War.
- The Indian External Affairs Minister began by reminding both Russia and China that 2.3 million Indian troops had helped the Allies win the Second World War, however India had not got the recognition it deserved in the post war world order.
- The Indian External Affairs Minister also stressed the need for reforming the United Nations so that it can represent the current reality of the globe, citing the need to develop a new "reformed multilateralism".

**Why did India Participate in the Meeting Amidst Ongoing Tensions with China?**

- Though India was initially reluctant to participate in the Russia-India-China trilateral foreign ministers' meeting due to recent clashes at Galwan Valley between Indian and Chinese military units, it agreed to participate, following a request from Moscow, that hosted the conference.
- Russia also welcomed the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Moscow for witnessing the "Great [Victory Day](#) Military Parade" held there.
- India values its close and mutually beneficial relations with Russia, despite major defence deals between Russia & Pakistan and strong Sino- Russia partnership.
- The meeting served as an opportunity for Indian external affairs minister to indirectly give a message to China that - "Respecting international law, recognising the legitimate interests of partners, supporting multilateralism and promoting common good are the only ways of building a durable world order".

- The important regional connectivity project - the [International North South Transport Corridor](#) involving India, Russia and Iran was expected to be discussed in the meetup.
- A dominant agenda in the discussion was regarding RIC's response to the globally raging [COVID-19](#) pandemic.
- The \$5bn deal for S-400 missiles signed between India and Russia in 2018, further highlights the necessity of strengthening strategic ties with Russia.

### **What are Russia's Interests in Holding the Discussion?**

- Russia experiences strained relationships with the USA (Snowden Issue) as well the eastern European region (Crimean Issue). Hence, establishing peace in the Eurasian region becomes extremely important for Russia. It does not want deterioration in India- China relations, as it is wary of India becoming an ally of the USA in the long run.
- Russia values its historic strategic partnership with India and it has been supporting India's bid for permanent membership in the [United Nations Security Council](#) (UNSC).
- Russia, under whose aegis the RIC forum took shape, has a keen interest in continuing the trilateral dialogue as it also holds the presidency of other critical forums like [BRICS](#) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization of which India & China are also members.
- In fact as per Russian Ambassador to India, Nikolay Kudashev - "The existence of the RIC is an undisputable reality, firmly fixed on the world map. As for the current stage of the trilateral cooperation, there are no indications that it might be frozen."

### **Why were Bilateral Issues Avoided in the Meeting?**

- Generally, the stated position of multilateral meets is that bilateral issues must be kept out as bilateral contentions could hijack the core agenda of such multilateral forums.
- Inter Governmental groupings like the RIC have broader objectives like multilateralism, global trade, instability in Afghanistan, terrorism and political security.
- Also, the Russian Foreign Minister had clearly announced the Russian stand that the RIC agenda does not involve discussing issues that relate to bilateral relations.
- Russia emphasised on a "constructive dialogue" between India and China to de-escalate the situation at LAC.
- Russia also welcomed the decision of both India as well as China for mutually resolving their boundary tensions rather than opting for an outside/ third party arbitration.

### **RIC & its Relevance:**

- RIC is a strategic grouping that came into being during the late 1990's under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, the then Russian foreign minister and Prime Minister (1998-99), to create a platform for counterbalancing the Western hegemony.
- Its importance lies in the fact that its 3 member countries together occupy over 19 percent of the global geographical space and contribute to almost 33 percent of the world's GDP.
- It provides an opportunity for creating a more egalitarian global economic order by questioning US dominance and making the Eurasian countries more economically and politically stronger.

- It is also a platform for the member nations to work on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.
- The fact that RIC is essentially the core of BRICS as well as SCO and the three countries, could work together in consultation with each other on how they would want to influence the global order in the coming times, through these larger platforms, highlights the relevance of RIC.
- RIC is an opportunity for the 3 countries to identify common interests such as tensions in West Asia and sanctions on Iran.
- Given Russia's massive energy resources and huge exporting potential, India & China could benefit from creation of an Asian energy grid, which could meet the growing energy needs of both India & China.

### **Areas of Concern for India:**

- China's hostility towards India and the ongoing tensions between the two nations near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Naku La (Sikkim) and near Pangong Tso Lake (Eastern Ladakh).
- Engagements through platforms such as RIC, are not going to change the basic conflictual nature of relations between India and China.
  - China has worked incessantly against India's interest and has spared no stone unturned to contain India.
  - Strained India-China relations could also jeopardize the goals of RIC.
- China's ambiguity on the spread of the ongoing pandemic COVID-19.
- Recalibration of Russia and Pakistan strategic relations, wherein Russia remained neutral on the Kashmir issue and called it a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan.
- Russia's pro China stance resulting in its open criticism of the Indo-Pacific initiative (between US and India).
- The close geo- political links between Russia and China as is manifested through the increasing Sino-Russian Arctic engagement.

### **Way Forward and Conclusion:**

- The meeting was critical because the meeting of Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs was scheduled on 24th June 2020.
  - WMCC was established in 2012 as an institutional mechanism for consultation and coordination for management of India – China border areas, as well as to exchange views on strengthening communication and cooperation, including between the border security personnel of the two sides.
  - This has now been activated alongside the military talks taking place between the two countries to de-escalate the tensions along the border in Eastern Ladakh.
- The fact that the China-India are in talks regarding disengagement at the borders, which signals restoration of status quo, indicates the role the recent RIC meet had to play with respect to this contention.
  - In terms of bilateral contentions between India and China, India must keep the lines of communication open as diplomacy and dialogue are important.

- Before starting off with bilateral discussions with China on any other forum, India must make it clear that there are going to be costs for the kind of misadventures that China is engaged in.
  - Considering the fact that India and China share borders, both the countries must find a way to have a working relationship which is in the interests of both the countries.
- Experts opine that platforms like RIC would only make sense if all the parties play by the rules of the game, not only in concepts but also in practice.
- RIC could be used as a platform for cooperation between all the three countries for mutually beneficial arrangements.