Russia - A Balancer in India-China Relations

What is the issue?

- The Russia-India-China triangle is reconciling on a shared vision and responsibility for the future of Eurasia.
- The watchfulness resurfaces behind the curtains.

What increased pressure would the triangle face soon?

- The strategic triangle might soon face increased pressure that could challenge the existing balance of power, as
    1. The U.S.-China trade war is tending to get out of hand.
    2. China may invigorate its outreach throughout the continent to toss American presence.
- Russia and India may benefit from the current status quo in interactions, enhanced exchange and geopolitical coordination.
- But, neither country is interested in becoming hostage to China's galloping regional ambitions.
- India is concerned about Russia growing more dependent on China, while the Russia wants to avoid possible rifts in China-India relations.
- Such beliefs act as powerful catalysers to boost more fruitful cooperation between the two nations on a number of areas.

Why is there hope for a more fruitful cooperation?

- In 2017, the bilateral economic turnout grew by almost 22% and by more than 17% in 2018; trade is projected to touch $30 billion by 2025.
- Despite Russia's well-known asymmetric trade model, **exporting raw materials and importing value-added products** doesn't seem to be the case with India any longer.
- A few years ago, Russia's oil giant Rosneft, invested $12.9 billion in India's Essar Oil, marking one of the biggest foreign investments.
- Russia is also studying the feasibility of the Nagpur-Secunderabad **High Speed Rail** and the **construction of major energy and transportation projects**.
- **Petrochemicals,** another area that Russian companies are looking at.
- India is now the world's fastest growing market for butyl rubber and halogenated butyl rubber.

- This is due to its rapidly expanding car manufacturing industry which is pushing for electric vehicles.
- The new areas of cooperation contribute to those where India and Russia have already developed a relatively stable pattern of interaction and exercise evolved traditions on the state level.

What is the defence cooperation between India and Russia?

- Dwarfed by the Soviet times and experiencing an overall decrease in total market share, Russia continues to serve as the largest arms supplier.
- In October 2018, Russia and India signed S-400 air-defence system deal that is among the agreements cumulatively worth $10-billion.
- **More deals are under way**, including acquiring additional Su-30 MKI and MiG-29 fighters, and possible participation in the Project 75 of the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force's contract for 114 fighter jets.
- Strong personal ties between Russian President and the Indian Prime Minister act as additional powerful catalysers.
- Russia played a key role in facilitating India's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which allegedly helped to dilute China's dominance.
- Mr. Modi has also become a regular at Russia's key national events and the two met during the Russia-India Summit on September 4-5, 2019.

What is the China factor?

- Demand to boost relations also prevails in the Russian corridors.
- Currently, China's GDP is 4 times larger and defence spending is almost 3 times bigger than that of India.
- Both the nations have prolonged territorial disputes that occasionally turn into border stand-offs.
- So, a peaceful exchange between India and China is perceived as fragile and Russia's balancing role is seen to be in high demand.
- Russia's relations with India encompass latter's quest to sustain balanced and diversified policy that keeps enough space for manoeuvering.
- In 1971, India signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union to balance a China-U.S. rapprochement.
- This move performs a vital role in Russia's interpretation of Indian foreign policy till date.
- In effect, close U.S.-India relations don't seem to be having a serious impact on the exchange.
- Despite the agreement to bypass U.S. sanctions and use of national currencies with Russia, India is still hoping to acquire a waiver from US.
- India acknowledges US's support in its claim for a permanent seat at the

United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

- India has also benefited from the rift in Pakistan-U.S. relations that emerged under the Trump administration and it became more assertive in Kashmir by revoking its special status.

What role does Russia prefer?

- Although Russia acknowledges its augmenting dependence on China, it envisions potential threats to the current balance of power in Eurasia.
- Unlike in Europe, Russia is not willing to punch above its weight and prefers the role of an intermediary.
- India acknowledges Moscow's growing dependence on Beijing that has accelerated amid the Kremlin's never-ending clash with the West.
- Nevertheless, with the Eurasian balance of power at stake, the need to bet on each other seems to be a shared strategy that supplies strong impetus to greater cooperation.

Source: The Hindu

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