



Detailed Report

The 17th Trilateral Conference of Russian, Indian and Chinese Scholars (RIC)

**10-11 September, 2019
Conference Room Two (1st Floor), CIIS
Beijing, China**

The 17th Trilateral Conference of Russian, Indian and Chinese Scholars was held at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing on 10 – 11 September 2019. The Chinese participants included Qi Zhenhong, President, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Rong Ying, Vice President, CIIS, Ma Jiali, Director, China Reform Forum, Ding Xiaoxing, Director, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, Wu Dahui, Director, China Association for International Friendly Contact, Cai Pengming Deputy Director China Association for International Friendly Contact, Wu Shan, Deputy Director China Association for International Friendly Contact, Li Ziguo, Acting Director Dept. for European-Central Asian Studies, CIIS Lan Jianxue, Deputy Director Dept. for Asian-Pacific Studies, CIIS, Han Lu, Deputy Director Dept. for European-Central Asian Studies, CIIS, Bai Lianlei, Associate Research Fellow Dept. for European-Central Asian Studies, CIIS, Jia Ding, Assistant Research Fellow CIIS, Zhang Jiaolong, Assistant Research Fellow, Dept. for International and Strategic Studies, CIIS, Cheng Shujing, Research Assistant CIIS and Wang Siyuan Research Assistant CIIS.

The Russian delegation was lead by Sergei Uianaev, First Deputy-Director, Institute of Far Eastern Studies (IFES) and the other participants included Anatoly Klimenko, Vice-Head, Center for Strategic Studies of Northeast Asia and the SCO, IFES, Alexandr Mokretskii, Senior Researcher, Center for Study & Forecast of Russia-China Relations, IFES and Vladimir Petrovskiy, Head Researcher, Center for Study & Forecast of Russia-China Relations, IFES. Officials from the Russian Embassy in China including Grigory Logvinov, Ambassador-at-Large Russia MFA,

Maxim Novoselov, Senior Counselor, Russian Embassy in China, Slava Volodchenko, Second Secretary, Russian Embassy in China and Timur Chernyshov, Third Secretary, Russian Embassy in China were in attendance.

The Indian delegation was lead by Ashok K. Kantha Director ICS, Former Ambassador of India to China, Ajai Malhotra, Distinguished Fellow & Senior Adviser, Former Ambassador of India to Russia, The Energy and Resources Institute, Alka Acharya, Honorary Fellow, Professor, ICS Jawaharlal Nehru University, Biswajit Dhar, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Veda Vaidyanathan, Research Associate ICS. Acquino Vimal, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian Embassy in China and Nikhil Vivekananda, Second Secretary, Indian Embassy in China were also present.

The Opening Remarks of the event were provided by **Qi Zhenhong, President, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Sergei Uianaev, First Deputy-Director, Institute of Far Eastern Studies (IFES), Ashok K. Kantha, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Yao Wen, Representative from China MFA, Maxim Novoselov, Senior Counselor, Russian Embassy in China and Acquino Vimal, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of India in China.**

Amb. Qi Zhenhong pointed out that in the midst of global challenges including unilateralism, and protectionism, the strategic dialogue between the responsible countries of the RIC was extremely critical. He said that the countries of the RIC needed to respect each other to facilitate an equal dialogue as strategic partners. As the visionary leaders of these three countries had agreed to jointly work towards regional development, there is a need to find new areas of collaboration including medicare, high tech, e-business etc. He put forth the idea that this is perhaps the best time in the history of RIC countries to work together and that bilateral relations provide the foundations of a strong trilateral relationship. Amb. Qi Zhenhong also stressed on the need for creating a ‘RIC vision’ of the international stage and to not let “other actors sabotage this relationship”.

Mr. Sergei Uianaev began his remarks by stating that time had proven Primakov’s idea of the RIC right. He quoted Lenin’s late works which had mentioned that the “RIC countries would provide ultimate solutions to global challenges”. In the 20th century, developing countries were in

the throes of fighting colonialism, the ideal would have been the emergence of an equal and democratic order, instead global realities include countries who still harbor hegemonist tendencies. He opined that as the RIC has hosted several meeting mechanisms since 2002 and bringing out joint declarations, the voice of RIC is getting louder, despite initial criticism that it will not be sustainable. However, it must be stressed that the focus of the RIC must remain on fostering harmony and cooperation without alliance. He emphasized the fact that no one in the world can monopolize power and that the international order must remain collective and democratic where all actors respect the principles of international law. Some actors he suggested not only hurt the WTO mechanism but destroyed international arms control policies, brought into force unilateral trade sanctions and the negative impact of all these actions has been felt by the three RIC countries. Responding to these measures requires coordinated measures and the think tanks from these countries can contribute to this effort. To this end, he wished the 17th trilateral would bring about new insights and ideas.

Amb. Ashok Kantha began his remarks by thanking the Chinese hosts for their warm hospitality. He said that since the last RIC trilateral meeting in Moscow in May 2018, there has been remarkable buoyancy in the cooperation among the three countries. The meeting of heads of state on the margins of G20 at Buenos Aires on November 2018 and Osaka in June 2019 has raised the RIC dialogue to the highest levels. The 16th meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China in Zhejiang, China on 27 February 2019 expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the 16th Trilateral Academic Conference held in Russia and welcomed the 17th Trilateral Academic Conference to be held in China. This has increased our responsibility, and we must ensure that we have productive deliberations at this conference. The 17th Trilateral Conference is taking place at a time of great uncertainty in the international environment. The geopolitical landscape is characterised by intensification of strategic contestation, unilateralism, worries linked to regional hotspots and terrorism, and sharpening arms race. On the economic side, the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook published on 2 April 2019 suggests that after strong growth in 2017 and early 2018, global economic activity has slowed notably since the second half of last year. We are confronted with resurgent protectionism, rising tide of populism and anti-globalisation tendencies. Recent developments related to US-China trade disputes are causing grave concern.

He pointed out that this Track-II dialogue is taking place immediately after Prime Minister Modi's most fruitful visit to Russia for bilateral summit-level meeting with President Putin and to attend the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok last week while India is preparing to receive President Xi Jinping for the second informal summit. Leaders of RIC have continued to exchange views on international matters in a broad and long-term perspective, apart from discussing bilateral issues. There is a wide measure of consensus on the current international situation with all three countries favouring multipolarity, opposing protectionism, unilateralism, and external interference in domestic affairs of countries, and supporting reformed multilateralism. He stated that the objective at this conference should be to come up with fresh ideas to expand trilateral cooperation in shaping the global and regional agenda and expanding practical cooperation among the three countries. It is not enough to engage in routine exchange of views on regional, multilateral and global issues. Instead, the focus should be on developing greater strategic convergence among the three countries, paying attention to each other's interests, concerns and aspirations.

He asserted that Russia, India and China favour the emergence of a multipolar world. "We agree that the world is in transition but a new equilibrium is yet to emerge; our biggest international challenges today, ranging from terrorism to pandemics to climate change, are trans-national in character, which are more amenable to resolution in a just, democratic and multipolar world." Some of the questions he highlighted that could be deliberated at the conference included: how do we collaborate on this transition to such an international order where the three countries recognise each other as co-equal poles, rather than seeking a hierarchy or harbouring doubts about each other's strategic intentions? As three major countries pursuing independent foreign policies, can we work together more meaningfully to shape the regional and global agenda on issues relating to security and development through trilateral initiatives? How do we explore synergies in our respective connectivity and developmental agendas while respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, openness, equality and best practices? Can we go beyond consultations and identify specific and practical trilateral projects?

According to Amb. Kantha, as Russia, India and China are also key partners in groupings like the BRICS and the SCO, moving ahead, we have to fine-tune the agenda for trilateral functional

cooperation in a manner which avoids duplication, yet maintains the salience and identity of the RIC which has a broader strategic resonance even though it is not directed against any other country. Here, we must dare to think big and come up with a high-profile project which leverages our strengths and catches public imagination. For instance, Russia, India and China are leading nations in the critical area of peaceful applications of space. We are also placing great emphasis on technology and innovation as drivers of growth. Can we come up with a joint space or R&D/technology project which is sufficiently ambitious to change the narrative and public perceptions about the RIC as a grouping? An essential requirement for greater trilateral cooperation will be enhanced mutual trust and comfort level among the three countries. India-China relations have an impressive track record of achievements and yet carry the burden of accumulated differences and mutual doubts which must be lightened. There are structural problems in the relationship which must be addressed with the objective of crafting a new *modus vivendi*. Prime Minister Modi and President Xi have personally anchored this relationship and there are great expectations from their second informal summit. In India, we treasure our Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership with Russia. Yet, it is a relationship which must be reimagined to give it fresh substance and momentum. Prime Minister Modi and President Putin have agreed that this relationship should diversify from the focus on defence and civil nuclear cooperation to economic issues. This was an important area of discussion between them at Vladivostok.

Mr. Yao Wen from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that he would share his personal views frankly instead of reading out his pre-prepared speech. He argued that we are currently in the middle of unprecedented changes and it was crucial to understand how the RIC countries would place themselves. He asserted that RIC countries were champions of multilateralism but were also victims of unilateralism and protectionism. He pointed out that there needed to be more momentum in RIC with member states working together to benefit from the 4th Industrial Revolution, 5 G, S&T revolution and find other opportunities for future growth. According to him, meetings of leaders and heads of state wasn't enough and there was a need for RIC to expand the scope of collaborations, increasing practical cooperation aiming for more tangible benefits. He contrasted RIC to the existing collaborations between China-Japan-Korea which extends to over 20 areas including culture, technology and trade. Mr. Yao Wen also pointed out that there was a need to reflect on the differences of opinion to find each others position on issues such as the BRI,

representation in the UNSC, the Indo-Pacific strategy and Kashmir. He suggested that there was no need to shy away from difficult conversations and although actors may have different views, they need to be discussed. He also suggested adding more partners such as Indonesia, Thailand to form an RI Plus. He concluded that although many a times government officials and diplomats had to be cautious in speech, academics could be aggressive with ideas and the 17th RIC could provide the necessary platform to facilitate such a dialogue.

Mr. Maxim Novoselov, Senior Counselor, Russian Embassy in China read out the letter of congratulations from Amb. Andrey Ivanovich Denisov, the Russian Ambassador to China. He said that the RIC could put in place joint efforts to solve international issues. The existing nature of the cooperation which includes meeting of state leaders on the sidelines of G20, cooperation in the security, financial sector, young diplomats meetings, arts festivals and joint efforts on cyber crime are encouraging, but the scope could be widened. He said that other multilateral frameworks like SCO and BRICS are complimentary to this process and that we all strive for a modern, just and equal world.

Mr. Aquino Vimal, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of India in China, said that the RIC provided an opportunity for the RIC countries to understand each others perspectives better. Considering the contents of the Joint Statement that came out of Wuzhen, the RIC was an appropriate forum to discuss contentions. He added that although the scope for cooperation was immense, he looked forward to more ideas on practical cooperation. In depth exchange of views on various topics including WTO, terrorism, climate change etc, could potentially provide unique opportunities to work together. He also stressed on the fact that RIC countries had the responsibility of safeguarding interests of developing countries and joint efforts were necessary to build a multilateral world order especially combating the shared challenge of terrorism that as faced by all RIC countries.

The first session was titled **“New Changes in the Current International Order and RIC Mechanism: Coordination and Cooperation Between RIC, Uphold Multilateralism”**. The two main themes identified for this session were **“New Changes in the Current International Situation, Global Governance and Global Strategic Stability”** and **“Uphold Multilateralism: An Exploration**

of the Agenda and Mechanism of RIC Cooperation”. This session was chaired by **Rong Ying, Vice President, CIIS.**

Dr. Lan Jianxue, Deputy Director, Department for Asia-Pacific Studies, CIIS stated that confidence on multilateralism had dropped and the chaos that exists in the current global scenario may just be the new normal and RIC countries had to quickly find ways to adapt to the new situation. He also stressed that western countries were looking to create hurdles in the cooperation between RIC countries as China-Russia relations in particular were perceived as a threat; a fact that is evident with frequent negative media coverage of the same. He questioned whether relations between RIC countries could withstand these provocations and either India could withstand pressure from the West. He also pointed out that although Russia’s relations with both India and China are strong, the China-India relationship needs to be stronger. The will shown by the two leaders to take this relationship forward is therefore welcomed. However, RIC relations need to move beyond Political and become people to people. Additionally, Trilateral cooperation mechanisms need to be innovated and more tangible ideas to take these relations forward. He opined that China and Russia had similar views on the US while India was more conservative on its opinion. The deterioration of multilateralism is a threat for all countries and thus there was a need to examine the “original aspiration of RIC”. While the 17th RIC trilateral Academic Conference provided a space for scholars to understand each others stand, there was need to take that further and extend cooperation into sectors including 5G and Pharma.

Dr. Vladimir Petrovskiy, Head Researcher, Center for Study & Forecast of Russia-China Relations, IFES, suggested that the current international order brought forth both opportunities and challenges for the three RIC countries. The biggest challenge being the sustained and continuous attack on multilateralism that needs to be balanced by RIC countries. The American attitude, according to him seems to be to “play the game in your own rules, ignoring other points of view”. He stated that former President Obama’s statement that the “US is a world leader, other countries shall acknowledge that reality”, was surprising. He continued “of course the US is a great country, but Americans keep trying to show that they are the world leaders. Trump has denied everything Obama has said, except this”. According to him, international governance has been compromised and is solely based on the Washington consensus. The US is trying to change the

three pillars of global governance structures including the WTO, IMF & World Bank. “When people try to degrade organizations, they will try to eliminate common rules of international trade”. In this period of US dominance, the RIC countries have to coordinate efforts and work together to straighten multilateralism. For instance, the US has exited from arms control agreements and Trump has threaded to deploy missiles into Asia - RIC needs to reflect on how to maintain International strategic disarmament. But of course, multilateralism as a concept needs to be redefined to include cooperation with the three countries coordinating their policies. Of this, the Indo- Pacific strategy and the BRI are two of the initiatives where the stand of all RIC countries need to be analyzed. As India’s point of view on the BRI is different from that of China’s or Russia’s, there was a need to start a conversation surrounding it and understand it better. Dr. Vladimir Petrovskiy also backed the Chinese idea a for a RIC Plus interaction and setting up a secretariat for the RIC grouping that will help coordinate issues. Most importantly, he concluded, the RIC grouping presented an opportunity to have new opportunities to strengthen international community.

Ajai Malhotra, Distinguished Fellow & Senior Adviser, The Energy and Resources Institute (Former Ambassador of India to Russia) pointed out that all three RIC countries are players of some importance in international affairs and see the benefit of a more polycentric world and possibly a more evenly balanced world. In this context each RIC country has primarily focused on enhancing its own global standing and this trilateral mechanism serves as another way to identify and push forward common interests and concerns and share assessments on major topical international issues. He highlighted areas where views of the RIC countries converge and these included: spread of international terrorism and extremist ideologies, scale of illicit drug production and its trafficking out of Afghanistan, transport connectives and economic corridors, especially the North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and Energy. As Russia is one of the largest producers and exporters of oil and natural gas in the world, India and China are amongst its largest consumers and importers. He also pointed out that Trilateral Economic Cooperation among RIC nations in the form of this scholars summit, business forum, experts meeting on disaster management etc must continue to be supported. He added that initiatives aimed at strengthening regional order should be based on principles of multilateralism, openness, inclusiveness and mutual respect and not directed against any country. Amb. Malhotra suggested that Space and Security is another area

where the interests of RIC countries converge. Especially considering that assets in outer space are vulnerable and transparency arising out of exchange of information and assessments would build mutual confidence and benefit all three countries. Other areas he highlighted where cooperation could be enhanced were cyber security, as the growing use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes is a matter of common concern, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and working together to combat climate change. He also underlined the significance of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure that PM Modi is expected to launch at the United Nations Climate Summit on September 2019.

The discussants for session one included **Ma Jiali, Director, Centre of Strategic Studies, China Reform Forum, Anatoly Klimenko, Vice-Head, Center for Strategic Studies of Northeast**



Asia and the SCO, IFES and Alka Acharya, Honorary Fellow, ICS & Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The initial aspiration of the RIC to increase cooperation between these countries on political and economic arenas have been met with heads of state and foreign ministers meeting regularly and

the trilateral gaining momentum. It was pointed out that this dialogue cannot be defined by negativity and the differences have to be discussed positively. Other powers should not intervene in matters pertaining to bilateral relations of RIC countries. We on the cusp of the systemic transformation of the world order since WW2 and collapse of the bi polar world order. A Poly centric/ Multi polar world order is taking shape. What are going to be the norms and rules that would build this new world order? World Institutions today emerged from victors, did not necessarily take into consideration the needs of developing countries. The RIC therefore has a responsibility to the new emerging order, we should play a stronger role in cultivating norms and building institutions. The world is getting divided, based on issues pertaining to security and the threats are overlapping, natures fusing, becoming increasingly complex. There must be a renunciation of use of force and resolution of disputes through peaceful processes and means. Issues traditionally considered soft have to also be taken up like Tiger conservation, global heating, protecting bio diversity.

Furthermore, RIC is critical to maintain stability in Eurasia, including preparing for hybrid warfare and new ways of confrontation including cyber, make campaigns, influence social organizations, support domestic opposition parties, fuel nationalism, use news to change perceptions, use economic sanctions, aim to gain control over regions and countries, leveraging their citizens, etc. Therefore in the SCO/RIC framework we need to respond to such threats, identify sources and find solutions. The RIC has not only brought stability, but is a force that has been leading the reform of global governance where both bilateral and trilateral cooperation are mutually supportive. There was however a need to emphasize multi sector, multi dimensional cooperation. Worryingly, ideas brought forth in the past RIC have not been pursued. Actors in the RIC need to work hard, scholars need to take up issues that the government wont, it is like a boat going against the tide but it is imperative to translate scholarly ideas to political will. Values of the RIC needs to be strengthened, need to keep abreast with the changing times but as we progress we should not forget where we are from - Lenin, Mao, Primakov, Nehru - need to keep in mind their legacies and original ideas for the RIC grouping.

The second session titled “**Bilateral Relations and Development Trends under the RIC Framework**” explored “the Current Situation of Bilateral Relations of the Three Countries”, “Promoting Role of RIC Mechanism in Bilateral Relations” and the “New Areas and Growth Points of RIC Cooperation”. The session was chaired by **Sergei Uianaev, First Deputy-Director, IFES**. The Chair pointed out that in the last 2 decades, the RIC mechanism has become more balanced and that trilateral actions will impact the bilateral relations of three countries. Suggestions were made to increase joint drills/ exercises, related to countering terrorism and also improving trust. One of the recent successes of the RIC mechanism, according to him was the fact that India-China border tension was diffused after 72 days of confrontation after both sides reached a consensus as consultation mechanisms had already been established. He also pointed out that there was a large spectrum of projects that were in place under China-Russia Relations and they could possibly be introduced into the RIC trilateral as well.

Dr. Anatoly Klimenko, Vice-Head, Center for Strategic Studies of Northeast Asia and the SCO, IFES began by saying that immensity of the geographical areas that RIC countries possess makes it a unique collaboration. Under the RIC framework, the most significant aspects are military and political issues. He asserted that US strategies have, with time, become more unfriendly to all three countries with its national strategy doctrine prioritizing competition with other powers than countering terrorism. US policy towards India has also undergone a significant shift as it wants to use India to restrain Iran and brings its MNC’s into the Indian market. Sino-Russian cooperations were comprehensive and included deepening military ties, with 3000 Chinese soldiers joining the Russian military drill, naval exercises, cooperation in space and bilateral trade expected to exceed to \$100 billion. He pointed out that the RIC countries were victims of terrorism and had to jointly fight against separatist and extremist groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan and illegal drug trafficking in Central Asia. He asserted that China should reduce its cooperation with Pakistan and reduce military activity as all of it is targeted at India.

Alka Acharya, Honorary Fellow, ICS & Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University began by stating that the “India, China relationship is old and new at the same time”. This gives the relationship depth and an interesting legacy to draw from to shape the relationship of the present. She provided a historic account of the evolution of the Sino-Indian

relationship and pointed out its watershed moments. For instance, she stated that India-China relations began with hope, but by it ended on a note of despair in 1962, while 1963-76 the relationship was in a state of paralysis but the paradigm shift occurred in 1998. During the period of 49-89, the boundary question defined and shaped this relationship. 2003 and 2005 saw the signing of landmark agreements and the countries increasing cooperation with greater political confidence and a series of MoU's and agreements signed on a range of sectors. The latest phase, according to her began in 2014-15 when the countries began a developmental partnership. From being perceived as a threat, China was starting to be viewed as an opportunity, and a core partnership that would anchor the rise of Asia.

Quoting Prof. Ma Jiali, she said that the five core issues pertaining to India-China relations are Territory, Tibet, Trade, Trust and Third party. One of the critical issues in this relationship is the trust deficit that arises from the Sino-Pakistan relationship. "China says that this relationship is not aimed at India, but in Indias strategic community it is not perceived as such". The RIC could be a platform to reexamine China- Pakistan, Russia-Pakistan relations as the heightened levels of tension has lead to an arms race in the sub continent. She also pointed out that the asymmetry that exists among the RIC member states has not hampered the pace of trilateral interactions. There is a critical need to sort out outstanding issues and in this regard the informal summit in Wuhan and the upcoming summit in Varanasi will help assuage negative perception on China's objectives. She also argued that China and India are not on the same page when it comes to political globalization and therefore it is vital that the strategic dialogue should be revived as there are solutions India and China can provide to issues to the international system.

Dr. Ding Xiaoxing, Director, Institute of Eurasian Studies, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations stated that China and Russia share a 4300 km border and they share a comprehensive relationship, but there are imbalances that need to be addressed. But there is a strong incentive to work together, with oil trade amounting to \$100 billion with 70 million tonnes of Russian oil exported to china. China is also Russia's biggest trading partners and gas partners as well. Practical cooperation between these two countries also extend to constructing pipelines, agricultural cooperation, GPS systems, new technology among others. Moreover, external factors are also influencing the relationship: behavior of the US, for instance, has driven China closer to

Russia. However, fact remains that Chinese & Russian elites want to work with the West rather than with each other, an attitude that is susceptible to change given the current international climate. China and Russia will also work together on international issues as they are both permanent members of UNSC and they should not let other parties sabotage their relationship. He concluded with the idea that, given that the US has already left the missile agreement/ Paris climate deal, RIC countries have a greater responsibility.

The discussions in this session were lead by **Alexandr Mokretskii, Senior Researcher, Center for Study & Forecast of Russia-China Relations, IFES, Ajai Malhotra, Distinguished Fellow & Senior Adviser, The Energy and Resources Institute (Former Ambassador of India to Russia) and Han Lu, Deputy Director, Department for European-Central Asian Studies, CIIS.**

The discussants stressed on the fact that bilateral relations between RIC nations has historical roots and their relations today cuts across party lines and sectors. They are not only witnesses to global changes, but are also part of this change. With India and China being major consumers of energy and Russia one of their most important suppliers, energy forms a crux of this relationship. India -Russia relations also include import of Russian diamond that are exported to the US, import of cooking coal, agrochemicals, farming, manpower exports and also cooperation in space including training Indian astronauts for Gaganyaan. However it was pointed out that compared to China - Russia trade that amounts to 100 bn, India - Russia trade is much smaller averaging at 10-11 billion, pointing toward the sheer amount of untapped potential. Minor irritants to this relationship include lack of support to India's entry to the NSG and Chinese narrative after the close door summit at UNSC on Kashmir. Moreover, after 17 RIC meetings, there are no concrete results to show and ideas are largely dormant. It was also brought forth that actors in RIC countries also need to use ideas to use technology to improve lives of people in RIC.

Several participants highlighted the fact that there were a lot of agreements in place, but there was a need to put some of them into reality. RIC need to speak out clearly about their own strategic targets and China needs to bring out benefits BRI, to decrease misunderstanding while India could throw light on India's Indo- Pacific strategy and how it differed from the US idea of the same.

Cooperation could extend to measures taken to control air pollution (example of Russian wood processors was made), renewable energy, new media, cyber security. In the RIC framework, there is a great deal of commitment among the top three leaders to take this relationship forward. Trilateral & Bilateral Cooperation feed into each other, facilitate closer relations. The litmus test of judging bilateral relations is that RIC nations are mindful of each others interests, concerns and take on board each others aspirations and are supportive of each others visions of their role in the world. India - Russia relations seem to be stable; strategic sectors, relationship is robust, but there is a need to reimagine, diversify this relationship.

With regard to India - China relations; achievements are creditable and overall trends are positive; but concerns exist on both sides. Negativity on both sides symptomatic of the fact that the countries are passing through a period of stress and strain. There is an accumulation of differences and outstanding issues including concerns in India about China's position on Kashmir, boundary question to trade deficit. There are also concerns about relations with 3rd countries: China-Pakistan; India-US. "As friends, we should acknowledged there are doubts on both sides about strategic intent. Need to devise a new modus vivendi..need to have closer strategic dialogue, on shared periphery, future role in the world. Need to have incremental growth". The fact that there is huge investment by Xi & Modi, taken charge with "hometown diplomacy"/ "informal summits" provides considerable strength. Indian concern on BRI, for instance, can focus on project specific initiatives. It was stated that among the RIC, India-China is the weakest part of the relationship and there is hope that the next meeting between Modi & Xi, will make clear that China-India are not strategic threats.

The third session titled **"To Promote RIC Pragmatic Cooperation: Economic and Trade Relations, People-to-People Exchanges and Dialogue of Civilizations"** explored "the Current Situation of Economic and Trade Relations and New Field of Pragmatic Cooperation" and "the Significance of People-to-People Exchanges and Dialogue of Civilizations". This session was chaired by Ashok K. Kantha, Director, ICS.

Prof. Biswajit Dhar, Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University began by stating that after a decade of hesitant recovery from the Great Economic Recession, the global economy is steadily slipping into uncertain territory yet again. There are ominous signs aplenty. Germany, the most prominent growth driver of the developed world and the fourth largest economy, contracted by 0.1% in the second quarter of 2019. And, the growth projections for the eurozone currency bloc has been adjusted downwards from 0.4% in the previous quarter to 0.2% in Q2. The IMF has become more pessimistic about global growth rates, it had revised the GDP growth forecasts in July 2019 and is currently sounding the alarm bells.

The effects of the trade war between the United States and China that began in the Spring of 2018 are now clearly visible as both countries are facing headwinds. Growth of industrial production in China registered a 17-year low in July 2019, and retail sales grew at a rate much lower than expected. Over the past two weeks, there have been clear indications that the United States will not remain immune from its conflict with China. Among other things, corporate investment is softening, despite the big tax cuts that Mr. Trump had offered to businesses with the expectation that investment will be on a virtuous cycle. In many ways, the economic uncertainties seen during the Great Depression in the 1930s are coming back to haunt the global economy. The threat of trade protectionism that we are currently facing has not as serious at any point since then. I would argue that the impact of present episode of trade protectionism, if continues that way it has, would have far worse outcomes because countries are more economically more integrated now than they have been at any point in human history. This is because the contagion could at a speed that none of us can ever fathom.

He argued that the IMF and the World Bank, the two Bretton Woods institutions that were established immediately after the war, never functioned in the interest of the developing countries. They needed to be fixed in order to make them development friendly. Additionally, in less than a quarter century since it was established, the WTO is virtually is in a state of paralysis. For a number of years, India, China and a few prominent emerging economies, had coordinated in an effective manner to try and shift the balance of the Uruguay Round Agreements in favour of the developing countries, at least to some extent. But the Doha Round negotiations are now sought to be given a silent burial, along with the aspirations of a majority of the WTO membership, namely, the

developing countries. More recently, the United States began dismantling another critical arm of the WTO, its dispute settlement mechanism. The Trump Administration's trade war was launched together with the objective of dismantling the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO. Knowing that it had indulged in blatant violation of its commitment to the WTO, the Administration decided to get the dispute settlement mechanism out of the way. This was the only way it could violate rules and yet not pay a price for its indiscretion. The Administration decided to break the dispute settlement mechanism by refusing to replace the retiring members of the Appellate Body, the most critical component of the dispute settlement mechanism.

The task for the RIC is thus, clearly cut out. These countries have to work with the rest of the membership of the organisation ensure that RIC needs to explore ways of rescuing the multilateral trading system. WTO members have always taking decisions by consensus, but when the organisation is facing an existential crisis, would voting to restore the Appellate Body be a way forward? He emphasised the fact that rescuing the dispute settlement mechanism should be the first among the many issues that the RIC must raise in the WTO. Among the more important of the other issues is the consistent attempt being made by the US and the EU to remove emerging economies like China and India from the list of developing countries. As developing countries, our countries do not have to take stringent commitments under the WTO, and this has been very useful for us to address our development deficits. Our joint submission in the WTO on this issue was particularly useful, but we have to do much more. The RIC has stood by multilateralism since it is our firm belief that this framework alone can ensure that the economic disparities between countries are effectively removed. He concluded by raising the question "What must the RIC aspire?" and answered with a quote by father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi: *"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny?"*.

Dr. Wu Dahui, Director, China Association for International Friendly Contact spoke about building a RIC centered Energy Community. He argued that currently the Oil & Gas price is not

decided by the buyers or sellers market. China and India are reliant on hydrocarbons, but the international energy price and trends of world energy market is not decided by us but by a third country like the US. Establishing SCO Eurasia energy community would provide a bilateral and multilateral framework, including members, observers & dialogue partners and other actors in framework. Member of RIC can contribute to building this energy community and this will help lay a solid foundation for economic dialogue.

Mr. Alexandr Mokretskii, Senior Researcher, Center for Study & Forecast of Russia-China Relations, IFES, pointed out that there is a significant Russian diaspora in China, Chinese in Russia and Russian Students in India. However, there is a need to further expand scope and number of People to People exchange. Soft Power mechanisms that RIC countries have include popularity of Indian movies in erstwhile Soviet Union and in Russia, Russian cultural centres in China and Confucius institutes in Russia.

The discussants were **Veda Vaidyanathan, Research Associate, ICS, Bai Lianlei, Associate Research Fellow, Department for European-Central Asian Studies, CIIS** and **Vladimir Petrovskiy, Head Researcher, Center for Study & Forecast of Russia-China Relations, IFES.**

The various cultural exchange programs among the RIC countries including film festivals, agreements to work on art restoration, promoting each others language etc was brought forth. Similarly, the flow of tourists and students among the RIC countries was also discussed. The need to With changes and challenges in the World economy, the US has changed their way of dealing with the world. It used to be considered a 'generous hegemon' but now under Trump, the trade protectionism the world economic situation is worsening. Moreover, Trump divided world energy into 2 parties: consumers and suppliers. The role RIC countries play in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan was also pointed out. There also needs to be more free flow between civil society organizations, scholars, researchers, young diplomats between RIC. It was pointed out that Visa processing delays in Indian embassy can be made more efficient, to move faster. India's demographic dividend will become a burden if you don't harness it, like China did in the 80's-90's.

Participants from all delegations also pointed towards the need for RIC to build an identity. One way of ensuring this is taking on a large-scale joint project in a third country which could be carried out in partnership with local governments. There is a need to integrate ideas from both groups. It was pointed out that these topics are not new, all of these issues were discussed 10 years ago. “We have to review history so that we can know about the future.” No need to propose more projects; the focus has to be on existing key cooperation. With the framework of RIC, we need material guarantee. “Instead of symbolism, focus (of RIC) must be on substance”. One specific proposal was introduction of RIC fellowship for young leaders another was that the RIC could replicate “IBSA Funding mechanism”.

The Closing Remarks at the The 17th Trilateral Conference of Russian, Indian and Chinese Scholars (RIC) was provided by **Ashok K. Kantha, Director, ICS, Sergei Uianaev, First Deputy-Director, IFES** and **Rong Ying, Vice President, CIIS**.

Amb. Ashok K. Kantha stated that RIC countries enjoyed clear strategic guidance from our political leaders. RIC has evolved since its inception and with high level meetings in Buenos Aires & Osaka, there is a clear understanding at the leadership level. This robust relationship needs to be taken forward. He stated that the deliberations of 17th RIC can be summarized by the host CIIS with key ideas floated that can be shared. There is a need to review of RIC process with 3 countries, pursuing independent foreign policies, favoring multipolarity, against protectionism, all 3 countries have benefited from globalization. He stressed that RIC needs to find niche in the popular level and there is need to raise profile of RIC. This could include taking on major joint R&D projects in the space sector. The RIC members also need to jointly work with other players. This could take the shape of developmental project in Africa or even Afghanistan. However, it may still be early to consider institutionalization of the RIC.

Dr. Sergei Uianaev suggested setting up a joint working group to enhance pragmatic cooperation while **Dr. Rong Ying** suggested taking on a joint research project or publication, the findings of which could be shared at the next RIC Trilateral Scholars conference.

Amb. Ashok Kantha also extended an invitation to the Russian and Chinese delegation to take part in the 18th RIC Trilateral to be held in New Delhi in 2020. **Dr. Sergei Uianaev and Dr. Rong Ying** accepted the invitation on behalf of their respective delegations and confirmed their participation at the 18th RIC Trilateral.

