

The Government of India has decided to launch a rural public works scheme 'Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan' through video-conferencing from village Telihar in Khagaria district of Bihar on 20th June 2020.

### Key Points

**Beneficiaries:** The scheme will empower and provide livelihood opportunities to the returnee migrant workers and rural citizens who have returned to their home states due to the Covid-19 induced lockdown.

**Duration and Outlay:** This campaign will work in mission mode for 125 days with an outlay of Rs. 50,000 crore.

**Coverage:** A total of 116 districts across six states, namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha (where maximum migrant workers have returned) have been chosen for the campaign.

These districts are estimated to cover about 2/3 of such migrant workers.

The chosen districts include 27 Aspirational Districts.

Aspirational Districts are those districts in India which are affected by poor socio-economic indicators. These are aspirational in the context, that improvement in these districts can lead to the overall improvement in human development in India. It is a NITI Aayog's Programme.

**Implementation:** It will involve intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of works to provide employment to the migrant workers on one hand and create infrastructure in the rural regions of the country on the other hand.

The workers will help build gram panchayat bhawans and anganwadi centres, national highway works, railway works and water conservation projects, among others across six states.

**Participants:** 12 different Ministries/Departments, namely, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport and Highways, Mines, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Environment, Railways, etc. will be coordinating for the implementation of the scheme.

**Connectivity:** The villages will join this programme through the Common Service Centres (CSCs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) maintaining the norms of social distancing in the wake of the pandemic.

### Common Service Centres

Common Services Centres are a strategic cornerstone of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). It was approved in May 2006 to introduce e-governance on a massive scale under the National Common Minimum Programme.

**Objective:** To provide high quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services, in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment as well as other private services.

A highlight of the CSCs is that it offers web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras

It is an integral part of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS).

India has one of the largest national agricultural research systems in the world. It consists of scientists, technical staff, administration support staff and auxiliary staff.

Such a large number of research and other personnel are required because India is blessed with a variety of agro-climatic conditions and it conducts research on all aspects of agriculture to suit these diversified conditions.

The first KVK was established in 1974 at Puducherry.

Aim: Assessment of location specific technology modules in agriculture and allied enterprises, through technology assessment, refinement and demonstrations.

KVKs also produce quality technological products (seed, planting material, bio-agents, livestock) and make it available to farmers.

The KVK scheme is 100% financed by the Government of India and funds are sanctioned to Agricultural Universities, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) institutes, related Government Departments and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) working in Agriculture. These are crucial to fulfilling the target of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

## THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT OUTLOOK

According to the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) released by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Indian economy is expected to contract by 4% during the current financial year (2020-21).

Earlier, in April 2020, ADB had projected India's economy to grow at 4% in 2020-21. The ADO analyzes economic and development issues in developing countries in Asia. This includes forecasting the inflation and growth rates of countries throughout the region, including China and India.

### Reasons for Contraction:

Global health emergency created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

After the introduction of lockdowns in late March 2020, economic activity in South Asia came to standstill.

The lockdown also disrupted the supply chain.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slowed to 3.1% in the last quarter (Jan-March) of the financial year 2019-20. It is the slowest since early 2003.

The overall economic growth slowed to 4.2% in 2019-20 as both exports and investment started to contract.

The Purchasing Managers' Index fell to all-time lows in April 2020.

Migrant workers have gone home to their villages after losing their jobs in the cities and will be slow to return to cities to work again.

### Growth Projections for Developing Asia:

Developing Asia refers to a group of over 40 countries, including India, that are members of the ADB. Growth of 0.1% is expected.

This is down from the 2.2% forecast in April 2020 and would be the slowest growth for the region since 1961.

However, China is expected to record a positive growth of 1.8% in 2020-21.

### No V-shaped Recovery:

Even as lockdowns are slowly eased and select economic activities restart, economies in Asia and the Pacific will continue to feel the blow of the Covid-19 pandemic this year.

Despite a higher growth outlook for the region in 2020-21, there will not be a V-shaped recovery.

### Issues Involved:

The Covid-19 pandemic may see multiple waves of outbreaks in the coming period. This may lead to an increase in sovereign debt and worse to a financial crisis.

There is also the risk of renewed escalation in trade tensions between the United States and China.

## Asian Development Bank

ADB is a regional development bank established on 19th December 1966.

It has 68 members. India is a founding member.

Japan holds the largest proportion of shares in ADB followed by the USA.

It aims to promote social and economic development in Asia and the Pacific.

It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines.

### Way Forward

India should undertake policy measures to reduce the negative impact of Covid-19 and ensure that no further waves of the outbreak occur.

As India has opened its economy, it needs to improve the supply chain which was disrupted due to lockdown.

A labour market recovery will be a key to the economy running again.

## RUSSIA INDIA CHINA

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.

Recently, satellite Micius has sent light particles to Earth to establish the world's most secure communication link.

## Key Points

### Micius:

It is the world's first quantum communications satellite, launched by China in 2016.

The satellite serves as the source of pairs of entangled photons.

Entangled photons are twinned light particles whose properties remain intertwined no matter how far apart they are.

If one of the photons is manipulated, the other will be similarly affected at the very same moment.

It is this property that lies in the heart of the most secure forms of quantum cryptography (the study of concepts like encryption and decryption).

If one of the entangled particles is used to create a key for encoding messages, only the person with the other particle can decode them.

### Recent Developments:

Micius has successfully brought entanglement-based quantum cryptography to its original ground stations 1,200 km apart by sending simultaneous streams of entangled photons to the ground stations to establish a direct link between the two of them.

The satellite provided entangled photons as a convenient resource for the quantum cryptography and the two ground stations then used them according to their agreed protocol.

None of the communication went through Micius (i.e behaved like a blind transmitter) providing the ground stations a robust and unbreakable cryptographic protection without the need to trust the satellite.

Until now, this had never been done via satellite or at such great distances.

It has not been specified how the messages were transmitted in this instance but in theory it could be done by optical fibre, another communications satellite, radio or any other agreed method.

Scientists have started using quantum encryption for securing long-range communication and Micius has been at the forefront of quantum encryption for several years.

### Quantum Race:

The disclosure of internet surveillance by western governments prompted China to boost quantum cryptography research in order to create more secure means of communication.

The launch of Micius and quantum communication systems with its help have been compared to the effect Sputnik had on the space race in the 20th century.

Sputnik was the first artificial Earth satellite launched by the Soviet Union into an elliptical low Earth orbit on 4th October 1957.

Any country could theoretically trust Micius to provide entangled photons to secure its communications but the satellite is a strategic resource that other countries would want to replicate giving further boost to the quantum race which has political and military implications that are hard to ignore.

## Quantum leaps

China's Micius satellite, launched in August 2016, has now validated across a record 1200 kilometers the "spooky action" that Albert Einstein abhorred (1). The team is planning other quantum tricks (2-4).

