RIS is celebrating its Silver Jubilee this year. During these 25 years RIS has been able to fulfill its mandate to serve as a think tank of the developing countries as also as an advisory body to the Government of India on all international economic issues, including South-South cooperation; and regional and sub-regional economic integration. At the same time, the organization has been engaged in research on international economic issues from the standpoint of all developing countries.

In recent years, one of the major planks of the RIS work programme has been to provide the intellectual basis of the ‘Look East’ policy pursued by the Government of India. Today India is one of the six dialogue partners of the ASEAN and is also included in the East Asia Summit. This is a direct outcome of the research inputs provided by RIS.

RIS is involved in promoting effective South-South cooperation in trade, investment, finance and technology. Towards this end, the organization has suggested strengthening of the IBSA Trilateral Commission, GSTP-III, and establishment of a South Bank. RIS is playing a major role towards the realization of the goal of deepening and expanding regional cooperation in Asia through SAARC, BIMSTEC, etc. The organization is also striving to build a broader regional architecture for economic cooperation in Asia.

Under the umbrella of its ‘Global Economic Governance’ programme, RIS has been working on a range of areas including WTO related issues, global financial architecture, and climate change, among others. During its journey, RIS, through its rigorous policy research and advisory services, has contributed significantly in the area of multilateral trade negotiations under the aegis of the WTO. Although the Doha Round of trade talks is currently going through a lull, RIS is tracking the negotiations closely and providing the much-needed negotiating inputs to the developing countries, as and when required, towards achieving a development-friendly outcome from this Round.

As for the global financial architecture, the recent financial crisis has brought to the fore a range of difficult questions for the policy makers from the developing countries to ponder in their endeavour to maintain financial and economic stability in the face of such crises in an increasingly globalized world. Realizing the imperative of well-researched policy inputs in this context, RIS has come out with a number of proposals with the aim of achieving a greater financial stability in the developing countries through appropriate policy interventions. For
instance, the organization has been arguing for the creation of an Asian Currency Unit (ACU), which could enhance exchange rate coordination in Asia.

Over the recent past, climate change has emerged as one of the prime challenges facing the contemporary world. Developing countries across the globe are confronted with the formidable task of sustaining their growth momentum as a prerequisite for accomplishing their multi-pronged development priorities, while at the same time dealing effectively with the multifaceted threats posed by climate change. Hence, the nitty-gritty of the ongoing multilateral negotiations on climate change is bound to have enormous significance for the future course of growth and development of these countries. In view of such importance, RIS is committed to make a substantial contribution in the policy making process on climate change in India and other developing countries, so that policy makers and negotiators in these countries are better prepared to negotiate with the North on more equal basis. With this aim in view, RIS is not only undertaking rigorous research but also advising the Government of India on policy issues pertaining to climate change, in general, and trade-climate change interface, in particular. RIS is also engaged in training and capacity building of government officials from other developing and least developed countries on climate change, among other issues.

In order to foster effective policy dialogue on regional and other important international economic issues among developing country think tanks, RIS has been collaborating with leading think tanks from different developing countries in Asia and beyond. Towards this end, RIS has organized a number of events and capacity building programmes, as detailed in the Report. To move further in this direction, RIS is guided by what the ‘High-Level Conference on Financial Crisis, Global Economic Governance and Development Responses of Asia and the Global South’, organized by RIS in New Delhi on 6-7 February 2009 to mark its Silver Jubilee surmised:

‘... (A) closer and sustained academic collaboration among think tanks of the South on global economic issues is imperative to help translating visionary ideas into practical policy prescriptions. To this end, policy-training and capacity-building in research among the Southern think-tanks would be crucial. This could be envisaged as a part of wider efforts to cooperate in terms of sharing of developmental experiences, including the responses to crisis, understanding the transmission mechanism and crisis-prevention in future. This would also give an opportunity to build on existing cultural linkages across the world.’

I am quite confident that RIS, with its new Director-General Dr. Biswajit Dhar and his dedicated research team and other staff, will continue to scale new heights in the coming years. I wish RIS all success.

Arjun K. Sengupta