


THE RIS @ 40



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The Research Information System for Developing Countries, briefly known as RIS has completed 40 years of its existence. For this institution, established in India in 1983 following the decision at the Non-Aligned Summit this is a significant landmark. It is an interesting coincidence that its 40th anniversary is being celebrated when India is engaged in chairing another important multilateral grouping, G20 and RIS is closely associated with the activities of the latter.

At the Non-aligned conference in 1983, it was felt that the non-aligned developing countries lacked sufficient expertise, especially the technical knowledge about various international economic issues, foreign trade and investment, or application of technology in their development programmes. That often resulted in their inability to match the developed states in negotiations on a number of multilateral issues. They required assistance in capacity building in different areas of their socio-economic activities. South-South Cooperation was thus the need of the day in which countries of the South would share their expertise and experience with fellow members of the South in building mutual strength. This initiative to set up a facility for the purpose could not have come a day too soon even as RIS was established in 1983.

Amb. G. Parthasarathi, Professor Sukhamoy Chakravarti, Dr Manmohan Singh and others who were the pioneers in giving shape to the concept had visualised the institute to be a self-governing autonomous think tank receiving support from the government for its basic requirements. The Ministry of External Affairs was designated as its parent organization with Governing Council members drawn from MEA, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Finance, Department of Science and Technology as well as senior economists from the academic community. Right from its inception, the agenda of RIS focused on the global economic issues as they affected the socio-economic development of non-aligned developing countries, as also development partnership and foreign trade matters of concern to them.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and formation of 16 independent republics were events of far reaching consequence. The economic reforms in India in 1991 was an exciting time. RIS responded to these challenges with imagination and active programmes. Important inputs were provided by RIS during negotiations leading to the creation of WTO. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 which caused a major disruption in the economies of Asia was carefully studied at RIS and useful advice was provided to the government as well private sector with regard to its handling. India's Look (and now, Act) East policy was a subject of much attention at RIS which along with connectivity matters became one of the major

work programmes of the organization. RIS had started a lecture series of eminent persons from ASEAN where former Prime Ministers from the region also addressed. RIS continues to host the annual ASEAN-India Dialogue. It was therefore only fitting that the ASEAN -India Centre was established at RIS.

The RIS work programme has continued to evolve with changing global environment. With the centre of gravity of world economy shifting to Asia. RIS was in favour of working with JACIK countries (Japan, ASEAN, China, India and Korea) towards regional economic integration. The concept of Asian Economic Community was articulated and actively supported by RIS.

RIS has continued over the years to take initiatives on trade, investment as well as trade facilitation. With regard to India's policy of entering into Free Trade Agreements or Comprehensive Economic Cooperation agreements RIS has consistently made important contribution. In fact initial work towards FTAs signed in recent years with a number of countries was done in RIS.

RIS also came up regularly with its World Trade and Development Report which was released at WTO. This was a much welcomed document for all connected with global trade issues.

New Technology and Development Issues is one of RIS' verticals. Under this RIS has also been very innovative in adopting new areas in its activities. It initiated work in the field of biotechnology. In recent years it has focused on Traditional

Medicine and is working closely with Aayush, the concerned Ministry. Science Diplomacy is another area which RIS has lately placed its emphasis on. It has held seminars on the subject and also started to bring out a periodical titled 'Science Diplomacy Review'. Given the currently growing importance and relevance of Digitisation as well as Fintech RIS is also engaged in these areas.

Blue Economy and Maritime India Vision 2030 was one of the new fields undertaken by RIS. The work done in this regard provided a very useful input to NITI Aayog and other Ministries of Government of India and state governments.

All through past forty years the commitment of RIS to development cooperation and capacity building has remained its top priority. Be it the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), energy, climate change, health, finance, or investment RIS' work programme has paid close attention to them. All along South-South Cooperation has been RIS' *raison d'être*. It continues to organise seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. as well as training activities with fellow developing countries utilizing, *inter alia*, India's longstanding ITEC programme.

It was remarkable that even during COVID-19 time RIS continued to function as actively as possible. A marathon job of producing the database of development cooperation with developing countries extended by all Ministries and departments of Government of India since India's independence was undertaken at RIS. Another massive work completed included

the list of all imports from China in recent years and the names of sources/countries which could be competitive alternatives for our imports. This was a useful input to the business community in India.

Regional or trans-continental economic integration is a key area where the RIS expertise has been put to extensive use in recent years. RIS functions as a leading think-tank in India for BRICS, IBSA, BIMSTEC, IORA and now the prestigious G20 and has created a network of think-tanks in those regions. During this year of India's G20 presidency RIS' role as a member of T20 has increased manifold. RIS hosted a major international event titled 'Global Governance with Life Values and Well-being' which emphasized that values and ethical considerations should not be treated as residual elements in formulating development strategies; they should form the core of the substantive practice in research , financial transactions.

RIS has a wide range of publications. They include books/ reports, Discussion Papers, Occasional Papers, Policy Briefs, RIS Diary etc.

The story of RIS in last four decades is indeed extraordinary. The number of fields of its research activity is unbelievable; so also its volume of publications. Thanks to the leadership of eminent economists and diplomats, indefatigable effort, imagination and commitment by its Director Generals like Dr Panchamukhi, Dr Nagesh Kumar and in recent years remarkably by Dr Sachin Chaturvedi, as well as untiring work by a small but competent

faculty like Dr S.K. Mohanty and others; consultants and interns fully supported by professional, staff members like Shri Tish Malhotra, RIS has grown into a leading and credible institution of research at the global level on international economic issues. It has been my privilege to be associated with its activities since past twenty five years. I am confident that RIS will continue to be a major think-tank for dialogue on global and regional economic issues which the international community will look to in the coming years.