China, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan: New grouping

Gs-Paper-2 China: OBOR (Mains)

Recently, China convened a quadrilateral dialogue with the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan.

Four-point Plan:

China proposed a four-point plan to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, boost economic recovery and resumption of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure projects. The four-point plan included:

- To share consensus in fighting the pandemic as good neighbours.
- To learn from China and Pakistan’s joint prevention and control model of the pandemic.
- To look at opening up green channels as soon as possible by the four countries.
- Green channel is the route followed in passing through customs in an airport, etc by passengers claiming to have no dutiable goods to declare.
- China’s expertise to the three countries in fighting Covid-19. It also included the vaccines that are being developed, to be shared with the three countries. Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan actively supported the four-point cooperation initiative proposed by China.

Other Discussed Issues:

- China also proposed extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, as well as taking forward an economic corridor plan with Nepal, called the Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional Connectivity Network.
- All the four countries supported the maintenance of multilateralism, strengthened the role of the World Health Organisation (WHO), backed the realisation of a ceasefire in Afghanistan during the epidemic, and the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

Concerns for India:

- China asked the three countries at the quadrilateral meet to take advantage of their geography, strengthen exchanges and connectivity between the four countries and central Asian countries, and safeguard regional peace and stability.
- The remarks assume significance as it came amid the border tensions between India and China.
- The quadrilateral meeting also came at a time of deepening concerns over
the India-Nepal relationship due to border disputes at Kalapani region.

- Nepal’s Prime Minister K.P. Oli also accused India of trying to destabilize his government.

Way Forward

China is making concrete strategic inroads in South Asia which will necessarily impact India’s interests. Experts are of the opinion that attempting to rope in three members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) grouping, without including India, is a provocative move by China and should be seen as a message.