

North-South Transport corridor

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Context- In February 2023, the Russian president said that was developing the North-south transport corridor(NSTC) that would open up new trade routes with India, Pakistan ,Iran and other Gulf Nations.The Russian president also signed and Agreed with his Iranian counterpart to develop the 162 km Rasht-Astara railway,a critical link in the NSTC.

About the NSTC

- First mooted in 2000,it was an idea to build a transport corridor to link Russia's Baltic sea coast to India's western ports in the Arabian sea via Iran.
- India, Russia and Iran signed a preliminary agreement to develop the **7200 km long international North-South Transport Corridor in 2002.**

Three years later, Azerbaijan signed up the project.

- This agreement was ratified by 13 countries - **India, Iran,Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan ,Oman,Tajikistan ,Turkey and Ukraine.**
- The original plan has several branches.On the western side of the Caspian sea, the project would link Russia to Iran through Azerbaijan. The eastern branch runs along the eastern coast of the Caspian sea and links the main corridor to different road and rail networks of Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.
- The western branch, which is the faster route , shall have the Rasht -Astara railway that would link the Iranian railways with Azerbaijan's railways ,opening a direct corridor from St.Petersburg to Bandar Abbas on the Gulf, the busiest port of Iran.
- According to the Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations in India, the corridor is 40% shorter and 30% cheaper than the current traditional route.
- The Traditional route to move goods from Russia or Europe to India is through the

Suez Canal -The Baltic Sea- North Sea- Mediterranean Arabian Sea route. The NSTC can be seen as an alternative to the Suez Canal.

For a country like India that is dependent on imports for 80% of its energy requirements, this corridor shall open up fresh avenues for energy security. India has substantially increased its energy ties with Russia over the past years. The corridor shall help boost trade between India and Central Asia.

