

Establishing Diplomatic Ties with Taiwan

What is the issue?

- The standoff at the Ladakh border between the Indian Army and the PLA (People's Liberation Army) continues amid failing talks.
- In this context, India could play the Taiwan card, by establishing formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

How is India's diplomatic support in the stand-off with China?

- The Union government and the armed forces made it clear that they will do whatever it takes to protect India's sovereignty and integrity.
- However, precious little has been done on the foreign policy front.
- India and its democratic allies, including the Quad security group, have declared their intent to form the "Asian NATO."
- But the Quad continues to suffer from indecisiveness.
- This was evident when it did not even issue a joint statement to condemn China at the foreign ministers' meeting held in 2020.
- Only the US called out China publicly.
- In such a situation, it is imperative that India explore alternate diplomatic and militaristic routes.
- The option of establishing formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan should be pursued.

How did Indo-Taiwan relations begin?

- Indo-Taiwan ties date back to the early 1950s.
- Chiang Kai Shek was the former Chinese president and former head of state.
- He fled to the island of Formosa following the victory of Mao Zedong in the long-drawn Chinese civil war.
- Back in the 1950s, he called on Indian PM Nehru to establish and further ties with Formosa.
- However, Nehru, believing that Chiang was nothing but a minor player, decided to ignore his call.
- He, instead, chose to concentrate on building ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

What necessitates ties with Taiwan now?

- Seven decades from the above, a plethora of changes has taken place on the foreign affairs front.
- Both China and India have developed considerable military and economic strength.
- China has even surpassed India to become an economic powerhouse.
- It has now embraced aggressiveness to enforce its 5th century vision of the “Middle Kingdom”.
- Given this situation, providing legitimacy to the existence of Taiwan is a necessary first step.

How ideologically significant will it be?

- The move will enforce the idea that liberal democracy is the last word in the battle of ideologies.
- It will establish that there is no alternative to human rights and liberties, not even the Chinese model of “authoritarian development”.
- It will be the boldest step that any global leader has taken.
 - Not even the mighty US has so far established formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

How will ties with Taiwan help India?

- Recognising Taiwan will entail a lot of benefits for India’s foreign policy regime.
- Taiwan is a robust democracy with a booming economy which offers opportunities for India.
- India can bolster its legitimacy as the leader of the democratic world at a time when the democratic institutions in the US have been undermined.
- Also, India can get the support of another powerful ally in its attempt to create a new supply chain alliance which India-Japan-Australia formalised recently.
- Recognising Taiwan will make it clear to China that -
 - i. India means business
 - ii. if the need arises, India will not back down from sending dedicated naval and air assets in the disputed South China Sea region to enforce freedom of navigation principle
- The Quad security grouping will be institutionalised, which in the near future can even be extended to include new members.
- With that, in a first, India will be a part of any dedicated military and economic alliance that will deter Chinese aggression in the strategic Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific Region.

What are the likely challenges?

- The recognition of Taiwan may invite severe ramifications for India given the fact that -
 - China is India's second-largest bilateral trade partner.
 - China is India's key export partner with regard to raw materials and goods.
 - India imports more than 40% of several important goods like the API (active pharmaceutical ingredients), television, chemicals, chips, textiles and many more, from China.
- As a possible retaliatory measure, China can activate its propaganda machinery to wage psychological warfare against India.
- It can also activate its terror financing networks which, for years, remained a chronic internal security issue for India in the Northeast.
- China may also collaborate with Pakistan by intensifying terrorism in the Kashmir valley and the northeast of India.
- Further, it can use its potent disinformation empire to try and advocate fake news on credibility of India's indigenous vaccines.
- Despite these, for the sake of the free world, India must take the hard step which will reinforce its position as a leader of the free world.

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