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.

Source: The Indian Express

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