

## India's International Politicking

### What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- India can't match China's deep pockets to win allies.
- Hence, it should consider deploying its soft power to further its vision and also simultaneously work out a strategic understanding with China.

\n

\n\n

### What is the current international context for India?

\n\n

\n

- 2018 has been a year of the India-China relationship reset, with multiple events that have unfolded thus far:

\n

\n\n

\n

- Wuhan: Indo-China Informal Summit in April 2018
- Singapore: Indian PM's keynote address at "Shangri-La Dialogue"
- SCO: 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit' at Qingdao, China.

\n

\n\n

\n

- All have sparked a lot of analysis as to what kind of strategic positioning India is gearing itself in the midst of U.S. and China's assertion to global supremacy.

\n

- The Indian PM has proclaimed ambitions to garner influence in the Indo-Pacific region by increasing engagement with the ASEAN countries.

\n

- He further stated his intent in developing friendship with China, maintaining

cordial ties with Russia, pursuing interests with Australia and U.S.

\n

- Nonetheless, tensions between India and China still impacts sea lanes, as both countries are actively pursuing individual interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

\n

\n\n

## How is China challenging India in the Indo-Pacific?

\n\n

\n

- India pursues influence through heightened diplomatic, bilateral and military engagement, among others to influence countries near it.

\n

- In contrast, China has started to garner influence through hard investments in cash-strapped littoral nations suffering from massive infrastructural deficits.

\n

- **ASEAN** - China's heavy investments in ASEAN nations have brought these nations closer into its orbit of influence to a massive extent.

\n

- Notably, ASEAN didn't even pursue the international ruling that barred Chinese activities in "South China Sea" vigorously.

\n

- China is today Cambodia's largest provider of foreign aid and has invested in dams, oilfields, highways, textile operations and mines.

\n

- In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has been seeking rapprochement with China, especially after his ties with the U.S. deteriorated.

\n

- Beijing provided rifles worth about \$3.3 million to the Philippines police and guns worth \$7.35 million to fight against Islamic extremists in Marawi.

\n

- Although India enjoys cordial relationship with all ASEAN nations, that alone possibly can't make ASEAN states overlook China's clout to endorse India.

\n

- ASEAN's trade with China also far surpasses that with India, and Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in ASEAN is 9 times higher than India's.

\n

- **South Asia** - Even here, which is culturally and geographically more compatible with India, China seems to be outsmarting India.

\n

- Countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka have been actively demonstrating interest in partnering with China with unambiguous clarity.  
\n
- Souring of relations with Nepal due to the 2015 fuel blockade and the failed strategic interventions in Sri Lanka have both undermined India's potential.  
\n
- On the other hand, China's multibillion dollar investments in Sri Lankan ports and cities have inched the country much closer to China.  
\n
- Last year, Sri Lanka handed over its Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease, which is also part of China's ambitious "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI).  
\n
- China has over the years promised billions for further infrastructure spending, which resource constrained India won't be able to match.  
\n

\n\n

## **What are the promising prospects for India to take forward?**

\n\n

- Despite China's deep pockets, the overt-assertiveness of China has driven many countries in East and Southeast Asia to seek friendship with India.  
\n
- Some ASEAN countries, with its cultural connections to India, and a sizable Indian diaspora are has been active in its engagements with India.  
\n
- Further, India enjoys global soft power through its art, literature, music, dance and cinema, an aspect that only the U.S. is at a better advantage than India.  
\n
- India is perceived by many in East Asia as a friendly democracy, making the country a safe ally to have in the long run.  
\n
- Japan has significantly increased its engagement with India and the two countries enjoy robust military ties.  
\n
- India and Australia have initiated the '2+2' dialogue signalling Canberra's interest in deepening a maritime security partnership with India.  
\n
- But India still has to develop a strategy to leverage its soft power and optimise its military power to effectively counter China's cash and hard power.

\n

\n\n

## What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n

- **Better Deal** - With China, India can strike a better bargain in comparison to the other smaller countries, due to its potential market and regional clout.

\n

- For example, China needs Indian support to take forward its BRI profitably, which is currently opposing it due to concerns regarding 'China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects' that runs through Pak-Occupied-Kashmir.

\n

- By demonstrating a willingness to join the BRI, India can positively influence China to re-evaluate the details of the CPEC.

\n

- **Innovativeness** - Since India can't match China's resource spending, a strategic understanding with China can help India gain regional influence.

\n

- With a strategic partnership with China, India can better pursue its own regional groupings like BIMSTEC, BBIN & SAARC.

\n

- **Thaw** - China's recently agreement with India on sharing data on the cross-border flow of waters from the Brahmaputra during the flood season.

\n

- Further, a protocol for enable all varieties of rice exports from India to China, has been signed, which is also a positive for India (for reducing trade deficit).

\n

- Recently, Chinese President Xi has also suggested a trade target of \$100 billion by 2020, signalling a gradual thaw in relations, which needs to be taken ahead.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n



**SHANKAR**  
**IAS PARLIAMENT**  
*Information is Empowering*