India’s Neighbourhood Realignment

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- India is moving swiftly to ease frictions with neighbouring countries.
\n
- But any neighbourhood policy can’t overlook India equations with Pakistan, which is presently not on desirable terms.
\n

\n\n

How has the relationship with China evolved under Modi?

\n\n

\n
- **China -** The new regime in 2014 started off the Indo-China diplomacy with much euphoria and personal touch, but things went off track soon.
\n
- In 2016, China blocked India’s bit to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
\n
- This was followed by China blockading India sponsored resolutions in the “UN Security Council” in order to protect Pakistan based terror outfits.
\n
- Additionally, China stopped sharing hydrological data on Brahmaputra river waters and reports emerged that China is building tunnels to divert water.
\n
- All these culminated in the 73-day stand-off at Doklam (Bhutan Sikkim China tri-junction), which saw a massive troop mobilisation on both sides.
\n
- **India’s actions -** India vociferously criticised China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) as a project intended to create debt traps.
\n
- It also stepped with maritime engagements through the annual Malabar Navel Exercise involving U.S., Japan and India.
\n
- India also played a key role in establishing the Quadrilateral (Quad), which is a security arrangement among India –US – Japan – Australia.
\n

- **Course Correction -** There currently seems to be a realisation on both sides that the risks of the downward spiral ties are in nobody's interests.
\n
- Hence, leaders on both sides have moved swiftly to change the confrontational attitude and opt for a more fruitful cooperative engagement.
\n
- On that note, sustained high level engagements started off almost immediately after the Doklam crisis got diffused.
\n
- The Indian government was also conscious when it avoided the ceremony that marked the 60th Anniversary of Dalai Lama's India arrival.
\n
- Also, Australia's request for joining the 2017 Malabar Exercise (which took place near Chennai), was turned down to lower the rhetoric.
\n
- Recently, the Indian PM visited China and for a long and exhaustive informal meet that is said to have covered almost all aspects of Indo-China relationship.
\n
- Border patrols on both sides are said to have been instructed clearly to improve communications with the other side and avoid stand-offs.
\n
- Although no progress has been made regarding disagreements on the NSG and BRI issues, a visible softening of the overall equations seems palpable.
\n
- With three other international summits (SCO, BRICS, and G20) for the year already on the calendar, there is every indication for a sustained engagement.
\n

\n\n

What is the situation with Nepal?

\n\n

\n
- Mr. Modi's visit in 2014 had generated considerable goodwill but subsequent decisions queered the pitch.
\n
- India's public display of unhappiness with Nepal's new Constitution and support for the Madhesi cause created ill-will.
\n
- Additionally, tacit Indian support was broadly suspected for the border economic blockade in the Terai region that disrupted essentials for Nepal.
\n

- All these had fed into an anti-Indian sentiment among them Nepali masses, something that Mr. K.P. Oli capitalised effectively in the election campaigns.
\n
- The victory of Mr. Oli was indeed a disappointment for India, but the government seems to have swiftly swung into action to undo the animosity.
\n
- A high profile delegation was sent to Nepal to congratulate Mr. Oli even before he was sworn in as PM, and an invitation to India was presented to him.
\n
- Mr. Oli seems to have taken these positively and had made India his first foreign destination – which is now the tradition for all Nepali PMs.
\n
- Modi is now expected to go to Nepal soon, which is again indicative of the fact that the tension of the past are fast waning.
\n
- There are expectations that the stalled Indian proposal for a Ramayana pilgrimage circuit linking Ayodhya and Janakpur in Nepal could be revived.
\n
- Significantly, while the expectations are being kept low, the optics of positive messaging are evident through the highlighting of cultural connections.
\n

\n\n

How are the equations with Pakistan changing?

\n\n

\n
- With Pakistan too, the Modi dispensation began its rule with a positive outreach, which also attracted a good response from the Pakistani PM.
\n
- **The Downswing -** Subsequent cross border terror attacks by Pakistani based terror outfits turned the initial friendship sour.
\n
- Also, the seeming reluctance of the Pakistani state to reign in the activities of anti-India forces on its soil further ruined the relationship.
\n
- The September 2016, India launched ‘surgical strikes’ to target terrorist bases in Pakistan (along the border), but this operation too proved ineffective.
\n
- Firing across the Line of Control (LoC) also intensified leading to higher casualties on both sides, both civilian and military.
\n

- The encounter killing of Hisbul Mujaheedin Commander Burhan Wani in Kashmir fuelled local radicalism in J&K – Pakistan is said to have aided this.
\n
- **Indian Actions -** India stalled the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit since 2016 in protest against Pakistan's actions.
\n
- The Trump administration too seems to be largely sharing India's outlook towards Pakistan, which has brought some cheer to Indian policy makers.
\n
- Minor fumbles in according comfort to the posted diplomats recently blew into a big controversy that saw actions and retaliations – which is concerning.
\n
- **Future -** Elections are likely in July 2018 in Pakistan – but Nawaz Sharif is disqualified by the Supreme Court and there seems to be no strong alternative.
\n
- This only strengthens the Army's position in determining the immediate political realities in Pakistan.
\n
- Significantly, Pakistan Army Chief Bajwa has been emphasising the need for improving relations with both India and Afghanistan.
\n
- The stalled "Track II Neemrana Dialogue" has been revived recently, which is a positive for both countries – which needs to be sustained till its logical ends.
\n
- Pakistan needs to address India's core concerns like – 26/11 investigations, curtailing JeM and other anti-India groups and the Kulbushan Jadhav case.
\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering