Mamallapuram Summit - India and China

Why in news?

- The second informal summit between leaders of India and China is to take place in the coastal town of Mamallapuram, south of Chennai.
- In this context, here is an overview of the terms between India and China in the recent period and the significance of the current meet.

Why an informal meet now?

- Informal summits have their use as trust-building exercises.
- The last such meet was the Wuhan Summit held in 2018.
- Among the decisions taken there was to hold more such summits, aimed at ensuring "higher levels of strategic communications."
- But, it is largely uncertain if in the past months the two leaders had succeeded in enhancing strategic communications.

What is the significance with Mamallapuram?

- Mamallapuram, a World Heritage Site, is symbolic of India's 'soft power'.
- It is an important town of the erstwhile Pallava dynasty that ruled this part of south India from 275 CE to 897 CE.
- The site is renowned for its architecture, widely admired across the world.
- Mamallapuram and the Pallava dynasty are also historically relevant in regards with China.
- The earliest recorded security pact between China and India (in the early 8th century) involved a Pallava king (Rajasimhan, or Narasimha Varma II).
- It was from this Pallava king that the Chinese sought help to counter Tibet.
- Tibet had notably been emerging as a strong power posing a threat to China then.

How have India-China ties been since Wuhan summit?

- Little has changed as far as India-China relations are concerned since the Wuhan Summit.
- **Afghanistan** - Wuhan Summit raised hopes that the two countries would jointly work together on an economic project in Afghanistan.
- However, this has proved to be short-lived; the political situation in Afghanistan deteriorates.

- But even as this happens, China, along with countries like Pakistan, is keen more than ever on ensuring that India has no role to play in Afghanistan.
- **Circumstances** - After the Wuhan Summit, many things have changed, altering the circumstances surrounding India-China relations.
- Relations between China and the U.S. have sharply deteriorated.
- In 2018, the China-Russia axis appeared to be carving out an exclusive zone of influence in East Asia.
- But, by mid-2019, new alignments appear to be altering equations in the East Asian region.
- These include a further strengthening of India-Russia ties, and a new triangular relationship of Russia, India and Japan.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also come under increasing attack, even from countries that earlier encouraged it.

How has China's domestic situation been?

- China is making a series of achievements, and did not think it needed to make concessions to anyone, least of all India.
- However, China also has met with certain setbacks geo-politically and economically.
- The economy is far more fragile than in early 2018.
- Internal security concerns include unrest in Tibet, inroads made by radical extremist groups in Xinjiang and the Honk Kong protests.
- The attack by the U.S. on China's economic practices has only aggravated the mood of pessimism on the leadership's ability to control the above situation.

What is the case with India in this regard?

- India was disturbed by a host of economic setbacks.
- Nevertheless, India seems better positioned today than in the spring of 2018 when Wuhan summit took place.
- India's relations with the U.S. have attained a new high.
- Relations with Russia have acquired a fresh dimension, incorporating economics alongside a longstanding military relationship.
- India's line of credit to develop Russia's Far East has fundamentally changed the nature of India-Russia relations.
- India's relations with Japan have also greatly strengthened.
- The Quadrilateral (the U.S., India, Japan and Australia) has gained a new lease of life.

What are the conflicting issues?

- China and India continue to compete and have a contradictory outlook on many strategic and civilisational issues.
- These include the nature of Asian security, regional stability and the role of the U.S. in the region.
- The China-Pakistan axis has been further cemented.
- Doklam and the disputed border between the two countries remains an issue of concern.
- India's efforts to 'dumb down' the Dalai Lama will have appeased China to an extent.
- However, India taking keen interest in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh will be seen by China as a provocation.
- The moves here include -

i. the *Changthang Prahar*
ii. the reopening of the Advance Landing Ground at Vijoynagar in Arunachal Pradesh for the use of military aircraft
iii. a proposed major combat exercise in Arunachal Pradesh, in which the new Integrated Battle Groups will be seen in operation

What is the way forward?

- All the above are certain to be read suspiciously by China and to add to its concerns.
- Well ahead of the 70th anniversary of the republic, President Xi has already begun talking of the "great struggle" needed to build a new China.
- He is implicitly seeking a reversion to the Maoist period of "struggle to achieve victory."
- India should be cautious in understanding this change in terms of international relations.
- China's efforts are likely to be directed towards 'disruption', concentrating on disrupting the strategic alliances that India has forged recently.
- India, hence, needs to proceed with utmost caution at the Mamallapuram summit, to preserve the 'Wuhan spirit'.
- "Subduing the enemy without fighting" as in Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' would help in this regard.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Facts

Changthang Prahar

- It is an “all arms integrated” exercise codenamed Changthang Prahar (assault).
- It is planned in a “super high altitude” area near Chushul in eastern Ladakh.
- The assault plan features tanks, artillery guns, drones, helicopters and troops, as well as para-drops.

SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering