Opting out of Belt and Road Initiative

What is the issue?

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India did not attend the recently held Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Forum in China.

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Why India did not attend?

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- India referred to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and affirmed that **“no country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity.”**
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- International isolation is not India’s biggest problem as China’s connectivity projects under Xi’s BRI gathers momentum.
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- India is too large an economic and political entity to be isolated by another power.
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- **India’s real challenge** is to match its claims on territorial sovereignty with effective action on the ground.
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- Although the popular discourse in India sees Kashmir as a bilateral issue with Pakistan, China has always made it a three-body problem.
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China-Pak angle:

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- China is in occupation of a large part of Ladakh in the north-eastern part of

J&K.
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- To the west, Pakistan had ceded part of the territory controlled by it to Beijing after the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962.
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- China’s first trans-border infrastructure project in Kashmir — the Karakoram Highway — dates back to the late 1960s. Since then, China’s presence in Pak-occupied Kashmir has steadily grown.
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- As the CPEC deepens the integration between Pakistan occupied Kashmir and China, Beijing looms larger than ever before over J&K.
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Does China alley India’s concerns?

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- In the last few days, Beijing seemed eager to address India’s sovereignty concerns about CPEC.
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- Delhi was not impressed though, for the pickings seemed meagre.
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- Nevertheless, the effort by the two countries to address the tricky issue of territorial sovereignty in Kashmir is welcome and must continue.
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- While it may be prepared to talk, Beijing is unlikely to suspend work on its economic and strategic projects in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.
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What India needs to do?

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- India must now articulate a political framework for economic and commercial cooperation across the contested frontiers of Kashmir in all directions.
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- The Sino-Indian argument on CPEC in Kashmir is deeply connected to the question of Arunachal Pradesh.
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- While China asks India to downplay the sovereignty argument in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, Beijing objects to all Indian activity, political or economic,

in Arunachal Pradesh.
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- The state is part of the Indian Union, but is claimed in entirety by China.
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- **In Arunachal, India needs to raise its game on accelerating the state's economic development and its connectivity to the rest of India.**
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- Delhi must devote high-level political attention to the long-neglected Andaman and Nicobar islands that sit across China's planned maritime silk routes in the eastern Indian Ocean.
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Source: The Indian Express

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