Relooking the CPEC

Why in news?

\n\n

India should open negotiations with the Chinese to explore if CPEC can be extended west to Afghanistan and east to India

\n\n

What is the background of the issue?

\n\n

\n
- India’s stress is the proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) traverses through Indian sovereign territory in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) which is a part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
\n
- When India gained independence in August 1947, the state of Jammu and Kashmir had an area of 222,236 sq. km.
\n
- Since then, due to conflict and aggression, Pakistan occupies about 78,114 sq. km and China about 42,685 sq. km, including 5,180 sq. km illegally ceded by Pakistan to China.
\n
- About 101,437 sq. km remains with India. Thus, three states are now in contention in Kashmir, with China denying strenuously that Aksai Chin, the area that it occupies, was ever a part of Kashmir.
\n
- However, as far as CPEC is concerned, what interests us is the position of GB.
\n

\n\n

What is the Pakistan strategy over the issue?

\n\n

\n
- Over the years Pakistan has tried assiduously to maintain that PoK and GB

are two separate entities.
\n
- There is no mention of GB as a part of Pakistan in the various constitutions of Pakistan, be it the 1956, 1962, 1972 or the 1973 constitution.
\n
- Even the Sino-Pak Agreement of 1963 states in Article VI that “after the settlement of Kashmir by India and Pakistan, the sovereign authority will reopen negotiations with the People’s Republic of China.”
\n
- Thus both Pakistan and China admit that presently they do not exercise sovereignty over GB till a final settlement is reached.
\n
- Perhaps Pakistan would like GB to become its fifth province, It prefers to rule GB directly rather than through the PoK authorities.
\n
- The possibility exists, therefore, that China may encourage Pakistan to detach GB from PoK and to declare it as a province of Pakistan with full Pakistani sovereignty over it.
\n

\n\n

What is India’s Strategy?

\n\n

\n
- India’s actual policy too has been one of strategic ambiguity.
\n
- Soon after the 1962 conflict with China, both the US and the UK pushed India into talks with Pakistan with a view to arrive at a final settlement of the Kashmir issue.
\n
- The Swaran Singh-Zulfikar Ali Bhutto talks that followed had as their basis the partition of Kashmir along the ceasefire line (CFL) with a few more areas going to Pakistan.
\n
- The conflict of 1965 led to the Tashkent Agreement where both the great powers, Soviet Union and the US, determined to restore the CFL by asking both India and Pakistan to withdraw to positions previously held.
\n
- In fact US, official maps show PoK with the same colour wash as Pakistan and a similar position for India.
\n
- In Chinese maps, Aksai Chin is never shown as a part of Kashmir.
\n

- In several discussions with the Pakistanis over the years, India has maintained that if Pakistan accepts the CFL/LoC (line of control) as the international boundary between India and Pakistan, then it would be quite willing to give up its claims on PoK.
  \n

\n\n

What are the options available to India?

\n\n

\n
- CPEC is a net geo-strategic power addition to the formidable Sino-Pakistan nexus as it exists today.
  \n
- There is no doubt that India will be faced with a daunting challenge as the construction and other activities pick up in CPEC in the years ahead.
  \n
- So, India has to plan diplomatically to withstand this issue, there are few options available for India thy are as follow.
  \n
- Planning a diplomatic offense with vigorous protests to both China and Pakistan, this may not get us far.
  \n
- Causing a sufficient turmoil in the Baloch areas particularly by verbal and diplomatic support to dissidents there, this option also has limited value since the Chinese can push back in the Ladakh sector in retaliation.
  \n
- Entering into negotiations with the Chinese on CPEC, the first issue would be on how to circumvent the vexed issue of sovereignty in the GB area, since this has emerged as one of the more important points in the position taken by India.
  \n
- After all China also takes a hard-line position when development issues are on the table in the case of Arunachal Pradesh. Perhaps diplomatic finesse and obfuscation would be necessary.
  \n
- But the most important issue on the agenda could be the extension of CPEC (or a renamed version of it) into a western arm to Afghanistan and an eastern arm to India.
  \n
- We have long desired a land link to Afghanistan and to Central Asia and this would be a major strategic gain for us.
  \n

- However, the fundamental question remains: Would China buy into this narrative? And could it persuade Pakistan to comply? The only way to test it is to open negotiations with the Chinese.
  \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Live Mint

\n

