

Resetting Indian Diplomacy

What is the issue?

- Since June 2020, when China grabbed parcels of India's Ladakh territory, India's focus has shifted from Pakistan to China.
- Indian diplomacy needs a global reset.

What is the current situation?

- It's now clear that the Chinese are not planning to budge.
- Both the armies will have to dig in for the long-haul, eye-balling each other through the freezing Ladakh winter.
- Simultaneously, it's become obvious India isn't able to hurt China in any meaningful economic way with sanctions like banning apps.
- The Chinese are so deeply entrenched in our economy that it is virtually impossible to remove them root and branch.

What is India trying to do?

- Indian policymakers are veering round to the view the only way to strike at China is via the sea route.
- That's why they are looking at building up bases in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- These islands are close to the Malacca Straits through which most Chinese oil passes.
- The Chinese have already built a string of bases in the Indian Ocean in places like Djibouti and Gwadar, Pakistan.
- But India's trump card is India's Malacca Straits proximity.

How should India make its moves?

- Keeping the Chinese in mind, India needs to make other further calculated diplomatic moves, both with neighbours and global powers.
- Of late, the Indian administration has visibly tilted towards the US.
- It has invested heavily in Donald Trump.
- There are many foreign policy examples to show putting all your money on one horse can land you with a big hole in your diplomatic pocket.

What is the shift in geopolitics?

- In the middle distance and the Indian neighbourhood, transformational changes are happening, requiring nimble action.
- **Middle East** - The Saudis and the UAE are keen to build ties with India, one of the world's largest oil buyers in a Covid-hit market.
- Perhaps this is why Saudi ties with Pakistan have frayed.
- As a result, Pakistan's leaning even more heavily on China.
- China is also moving closer to Iran, a country with which India has historically enjoyed warm ties.
- **Bangladesh** - India is keen to rebuild relations with Bangladesh.
- In July 2020, the first transshipment of goods destined for India's north-east from Haldia to Chittagong took place.
- India has strengthened inland waterways agreements with Bangladesh.
- It has also gifted some locomotives and is building a power plant there.

What should India do further?

- India needs to mend ties with Nepal as well which has come under strong Chinese influence.
- India is in a critical battle for power in its neighbourhood with an extremely powerful rival.
- So, it should be careful with each step.

Source: Business Line