The Chinese Challenge uncovers India's Fragilities

Why in news?

A military defeat in the 1962 Sino-India war has no real bearing on the current border tensions, but is a constant reminder to Delhi of its own fears and insecurities.

What is the issue?

- It has been nearly 20 months after the border crisis began in Ladakh.
- Beijing recently renamed 15 places in Arunachal Pradesh, following the six it had done in 2017.
- China justifies the renaming as being done on the basis that these old names existed since ancient times which had been changed by India with its illegal occupation.
- The External Affairs Ministry said that Arunachal Pradesh, itself a Sanskritised rechristening of the North-East Frontier Agency was an integral part of India.

To know more about the China's New Border Law, click here

What are the reasons for submissiveness by the Indian government?

- Last month, Political Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy wrote an angry letter to Indian Members of Parliament for attending a meet organised by the Tibetan government-in-exile.
- It did not even earn an official condemnation from the External Affairs Ministry.
- The reasons for such submissiveness by the Indian government towards the Chinese are evident.
- **Lack of proactive options**- Delhi has run out of proactive options against Beijing that will force the Chinese leadership to change course on its India policy.
- Tibet and the Dalai Lama which were often projected as a trump card holds no value now.
- **Dependency on China**- Indian dependency on Chinese manufacturing was further worsened by the Government's mishandling of the novel coronavirus pandemic.
- Delhi has little geopolitical or economic leverage over Beijing to boast of.

What efforts were taken by India to restore the *status quo ante* on the LAC?

- **Dependency on the U.S.-** India undertook internal balancing of its military from the Pakistan border to the China border and external rebalancing through a closer partnership with the United States in the Indo-Pacific.
- But the **Quad** (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.) has remained a non-military grouping.
- The signing of the **AUKUS** (a security pact between Australia, the UK and the U.S.) and the American exit from Afghanistan made it clear that India will have to deal with the Chinese border crisis on its own.

- Since 2017, India's economy is incapable of supporting such a target.
- **Hopes on Moscow**- The Indian government has now placed its hopes on Moscow which is keen to play a mediator between India and China.
- Russian officials offer for a Foreign Ministers meeting of the **Russia-India-China** grouping but Delhi first wants to see some steps from China towards resolving the border crisis.

What does the Chinese challenge mean for India?

- **Exposes the vulnerability**- The Chinese challenge has exposed India's political, economic and diplomatic fragilities globally.
- **Reduced pressure on Pakistan**- Worried about the threat of a two-front collusive threat, the Indian government is no longer as outspoken on Pakistan.
- **U.S. engagement**- India's difficult diplomatic and military engagement with China is going to leave it more dependent on U.S. support, rendering the government more vulnerable to American pressure on 'shared values'.
- **Attack on minorities**- India's internal situation, from Nagaland to Kashmir, with the minorities under attack has only aggravated the issue.
- The U.S. is currently looking away even as India mistreats its minorities and its democracy stands diminished.
- **Past issues-** With the loss in the 1962 war, India lost its pre-eminent position in Asia.
- PLA soldiers walked into Chumar even as Mr. Modi hosted Mr. Xi in Ahmedabad in 2014.
- The **Doklam crisis** of 2017 triggered the border crisis of 2020.

What is the way forward?

- Delhi continues to face difficult choices with a rising China, a more self-centred U.S. which is uncomfortable with India's partnership with Russia.
- A shared and deliberative model of decision-making would work best.
- As a proponent and exemplar of personality-centric diplomacy, which included two informal summits with Mr. Xi, it is time for Mr. Modi to step up and personally resolve the crisis.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-chinese-challenge-uncovers-indias-fragilities/article38138660.ece

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