GS-II: A Triangular Affair

News

Delhi will have to accept China’s role in Bangladesh while shaping its ties with Dhaka.

India’s abiding regional strategic objective ought to be one which ensures that Bangladesh does not morph into Pakistan either by way of being compelled into choosing Beijing over Delhi or nurturing radical Islamic ideologies domestically. It is to the credit of both Dhaka and Delhi that despite some missteps the bi-lateral is currently described as the best ever and a template for India’s ties with its other neighbours.

Wuhan Summit:

- The coastal town of Mamallapuram (aka Mahabalipuram) has pipped the sacred city of Varanasi to host the historic informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping.
- The historical Buddhism connection is being capitalised well with statues of Buddha seen at various vantage points in Mamallapuram, which is getting a major facelift with hundreds of workers toiling round-the-clock to ensure that the town is ready for the historic meeting between October 11 and 13.

Historical connect between Mamallapuram with China:

- Historians said that the ancient port town of Mamallapuram was used effectively by the Pallavas to trade with China.
- More importantly, Buddhist monk Bodhidharma, who was an icon in China, was the third prince of a Pallava king who travelled to China from Kancheepuram via Mamallapuram in 527AD.
- He went on to become the 28th patriarch of Buddhism succeeding Prajnatara.
- Mamallapuram and the Pallava dynasty are also historically relevant, for the earliest recorded security pact between China and India (in the early 8th century) involved a Pallava king (Rajasimhan, or Narasimha Varma II), from whom the Chinese sought help to counter Tibet, which had by then emerged as a strong power posing a threat to China.

Significance of these informal summits:

- Informal meet at Wuhan resulted in invoking of Wuhan Spirit, which sought to reset ties between India and China.
- Wuhan Spirit is in line with the five principles of peaceful coexistence (Panchsheel) jointly advocated by China and India in the 1950s. Under Wuhan Spirit:
  - Both countries agreed that they form the “backbone” of economic globalisation, and they should jointly make positive contributions to global peace and development.
  - The two nations have agreed to cooperate, for the first time ever, on a joint project in Afghanistan.

Changing relations: Treading with caution:

- India also has other reasons to be more optimistic than a year ago because India’s
relations with the U.S. have attained a new high.
- The Quad (the U.S., India, Japan and Australia) has gained a new lease of life.
- China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also come under increasing attack, due to debt trap diplomacy (China taking the lease of Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port for 99 years).
- India’s 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.
- Due to Trade war, relations between China and the U.S. have sharply deteriorated.
- Also, a new triangular relationship of Russia, India and Japan, appears to be altering equations in the East Asian region.

Conclusions:

India will have to accept this as part of the evolving regional strategic calculus enabled by China’s economic trade fiscal clout and shape its own ties with Dhaka in such a manner that a truly win-win option can emerge.

The maritime domain and the Bay of Bengal in particular with Dhaka as the coxswain ought to be envisioned at Mamallapuram.