

Mains Master

Unbreakable

Context

- China's economic rise and geopolitical ambitions challenge India's influence: China's growth has allowed it to challenge India's historical dominance in its own neighborhood. Beijing seeks to reshape regional dynamics in its favor.
- China leverages financial power in South Asia: With an economy significantly larger than India's, China holds a financial advantage in building relationships with India's neighbors. It seeks to use this economic leverage to increase its influence.
- Beijing employs multifaceted influence tactics: China's approach involves deploying financial resources, targeting key figures within target nations, and shaping public opinion to its benefit. This multipronged strategy makes it harder for smaller nations to resist China's influence.

Background

- Bhutan-India:** A strong partnership built on trust: Bhutan and India share a unique bond characterized by mutual understanding, cooperation, and a shared history. This makes Bhutan crucial to India's regional security framework.
- China seeks to disrupt the status quo with Bhutan:** Despite the lack of formal ties with Thimphu, China actively attempts to pressure Bhutan into diplomatic recognition and a border settlement favorable to Beijing. This aims to weaken India's position in the region.
- Doklam Standoff:** A stark reminder of tensions: The 2017 Doklam incident revealed China's willingness to use its advantage to push its claims against Bhutan and directly challenge India's security interests in the area. Importance of Bhutan
- Bhutan as a security shield**
- Geographic buffer zone:** Bhutan's location within the Himalayas forms a natural defensive barrier between China and India's northeastern states. This buffer absorbs pressure from China's military presence in Tibet and limits Beijing's ability to easily project power southwards.
- Protecting the Siliguri Corridor:** The Siliguri Corridor is the most critical element Bhutan safeguards. Any disruption in this area would have severe consequences for India (explained below). Bhutan's presence makes it significantly harder for China to contemplate actions in the region.
- Early warning system:** Bhutan's close ties with India allow for effective communication and potential early warning of any aggressive intent from China. This gives India precious time for diplomatic action or defensive preparation.
- Siliguri Corridor: A vital lifeline**
- Connecting India's heartland:** The Siliguri Corridor is the only land bridge between India's mainland and its seven northeastern states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura).
- Economic dependence:** All essential supplies, including food, fuel, and construction materials, reach India's northeast through this corridor. Its disruption would bring economic life to a standstill in these states.
- Military vulnerability:** The corridor is crucial for moving Indian troops and military supplies to counter potential aggression along the India-China border. Severing this link would severely hinder India's force projection and defense capabilities in the region.
- Chumbi Valley & Tibet factor**

- Height advantage:** China's control of Tibet provides a high-altitude advantage with easier access to the Chumbi Valley, which overlooks the Siliguri Corridor.
- The dagger at India's throat:** The Chumbi Valley's position gives China the potential to strike a crippling blow to India's security. A rapid Chinese advance could potentially slice through the Siliguri Corridor, isolating the northeast.
- Infrastructure buildup:** China's development of roads, rail networks, and possible military facilities in Tibet and the Chumbi Valley amplifies its ability to quickly project force toward the Corridor, raising concerns for India.

India's Historical Failure

- Complacency rooted in the past:** Post-independence, India often assumed a preeminent position in South Asia due to its size, historical ties, and role in supporting the independence movements of many of its neighbors. This led to complacency and a lack of urgency in its engagement with the region.
- Underestimating China's strategic ambitions:** For decades, India primarily focused on its rivalry with Pakistan and internal challenges. China's economic growth and its focus on developing influence in South Asia were not fully grasped in terms of the strategic threat they posed.

- Focus on goodwill, not tangible benefits: India often relied on its historical role and shared cultural ties with neighbors but lacked a focus on delivering concrete economic and developmental benefits to cement these relationships.

India's Course Correction

- "Neighborhood First" Policy:** Jaishankar has repeatedly emphasized that India's foreign policy must begin with its own neighborhood. This is a marked shift from a historically more global outlook centered on India's role as a major world power.
- Pragmatism Over Principle:** India acknowledges it cannot wish away China's presence in the region. Instead of fruitless competition to exclude China, India focuses on deepening its own engagements with neighbors, offering a more beneficial and reliable partnership.
- Beyond Non-Alignment:** While elements of non-alignment remain, Jaishankar stresses that India must be willing to work with a multiplicity of powers and take positions based on its own national interests rather than rigid ideological frameworks from the past.

New Focus: Economic Integration, Sovereignty, and Security

- Economic Partnership as a Foundation:** India emphasizes large-scale infrastructure projects, trade agreements, and mutually beneficial initiatives. The goal is to bind India and its neighbors in a web of economic interdependence, making partnerships with India indispensable for their growth.
- Respect for Sovereignty:** Gone is any semblance of India seeking dominance in the region. Delhi stresses respect for the sovereignty of its smaller neighbors and seeks to build relationships based on true partnership rather than a "big brother" attitude.
- Security Cooperation:** Acknowledging that economic development cannot occur without security, India focuses on increased security dialogue, joint exercises, capacity building of defense forces in neighboring countries, and intelligence sharing to counter shared threats.
- Prime Minister Modi's Recent Visit to Bhutan**

- Symbolism of Solidarity:** The visit reinforces India's commitment to Bhutan's development and security, demonstrating a united front in the face of increasing Chinese pressure.
- Economic Boost:** India's significant increase in financial aid for Bhutanese development initiatives aims to deepen economic ties and counterbalance any economic incentives China may offer.
- Connectivity Focus:** Infrastructure and digital connectivity projects promote regional integration, boosting trade and travel, which benefits both Bhutan and India.
- Security & Coordination:** Strengthening security cooperation through increased dialogue and strategic coordination sends a message of India's support for Bhutan and shared concerns about regional security.

Questionable conduct

- Context:
- The conduct of Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, has come under scrutiny due to his refusal to re-induct K. Ponmudy into the state cabinet, despite Ponmudy's eligibility being reinstated following a court-stayed corruption conviction.
- This incident highlights broader concerns regarding the adherence of Governors to constitutional principles and the proper functioning of democratic institutions.
- Background:
- Ravi's actions, including his handling of pending bills and interpretation of legal rulings, have been subject to judicial review, revealing a pattern of reluctance to uphold constitutional mandates.
- Previous instances of delayed action on pending bills underscore a tendency to disregard constitutional duties, further exacerbating concerns about gubernatorial conduct.
- Issues at Hand:**
- Gubernatorial overreach**
- Ravi's refusal to re-induct Ponmudy, despite his legal eligibility, represents an overreach of gubernatorial powers.
- This undermines the democratic process and erodes public trust in the rule of law.

- **Governor as Agent of State:**
- There are concerns that Governors may be influenced by central government agendas rather than serving as impartial guardians of constitutional integrity.

- This raises questions about the appointment process for Governors and their role in upholding the federal structure of governance.

- **Possible Solutions:**
- **Reinforcing Constitutional Norms:**
- Clearer guidelines should be established for gubernatorial conduct to ensure adherence to constitutional principles.

- Accountability mechanisms must be strengthened to uphold the rule of law and prevent gubernatorial overreach.

- **Reviewing Appointment Criteria:**
- The Centre should reevaluate the criteria for appointing Governors, prioritizing individuals committed to upholding constitutional values and respecting the autonomy of state governments.

- **Way Forward:**
- The Centre must acknowledge the seriousness of the situation and take decisive action to address it.

- Governors who consistently disregard constitutional principles should be replaced with individuals who prioritize the rule of law.

- By fostering a culture of respect for constitutional norms, trust in democratic institutions can be restored, ultimately strengthening India's democratic framework.

TB control in India calls for person-centred solutions

Context

- Tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant public health threat in India, affecting millions yearly.
- Ambitious goals for TB elimination exist, but progress is slow.
- Traditional approaches prioritize medical aspects, overlooking the lived experiences of people affected by TB.

Background

- India's TB control efforts have relied on medicalization, often neglecting the human, economic, and social dimensions of the disease.
- TB survivors and advocates are demanding policy changes to prioritize patient needs.

Present Status of TB in India

- Key challenges:
 - Limited access to efficient diagnosis and treatment, especially in rural and underserved areas.
 - Insufficient availability of quality-assured drugs and diagnostics.
 - Persistent stigma and discrimination against TB patients.
- Socio-economic factors like poverty and malnutrition fueling the TB epidemic.

Causes of TB in India

- Biological: The TB bacterium (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*).
- Social: Poverty, overcrowded living conditions, poor nutrition, limited access to healthcare.
- Environmental: Poor ventilation, air pollution.

Possible Solutions

- Prioritize Person-Centered Care: Place the patient at the heart of the care process by:
 - Addressing mental health needs and ensuring gender-responsive care.
 - Offering nutritional support.
 - Expanding access to accurate diagnostics, especially molecular testing.
 - Empowering community-based TB care models driven by frontline healthcare workers.
- Address Social Determinants:
 - Poverty alleviation programs.
 - Improve housing conditions for better ventilation.
 - Nutritional support for TB patients and those at risk.

- **Leverage Technology:**
 - Implement AI and digital health tools for improved diagnosis, treatment adherence, and surveillance.
 - Invest in developing better TB vaccines.

Way Forward

India must adopt a holistic approach to TB control. By prioritizing person-centered solutions, tackling socio-economic inequalities, and embracing innovation, the country can make significant strides towards eliminating TB and building a healthier future for its citizens

Prelims Booster

On the resurgence of mumps in Kerala

- Mumps outbreaks in Kerala have surged, with over 15,000 cases reported this year, raising concerns about complications like meningoencephalitis and pancreatitis, highlighting the need for effective control measures and vaccination strategies to curb the spread of the viral infection among children and adolescents.
- Despite being vaccine-preventable, mumps is not included in India's Universal Immunisation Programme due to its perceived low public health significance, prompting calls for the inclusion of the Mumps-Measles-Rubella (MMR) vaccine to enhance immunisation coverage and combat the resurgence of mumps cases, particularly in regions experiencing community outbreaks.
- Health officials stress the importance of public awareness, isolation of infected individuals, and improving immunisation coverage to contain mumps transmission, emphasizing the need for sustained efforts to address the disease's impact on reproductive health and prevent long-term complications associated with mumps infections.
- The World Health Organization recommends integrating mumps control strategies with existing measles elimination and rubella control efforts, underscoring the significance of vaccination programs in mitigating the spread of mumps and safeguarding public health against preventable infectious diseases.

Sangita Kalanidhi Controversy

- Renowned vocalist TM Krishna, celebrated for his artistic brilliance and activism, faces criticism from traditionalists and gatekeepers for his non-conformist views and advocacy for social change, challenging caste, gender, and power dynamics within the Carnatic music community and igniting debates on reform and renewal.
- Krishna's pursuit of artistic freedom and integrity extends beyond music, encompassing advocacy for marginalized communities, public engagement, and policy advocacy, sparking controversy and backlash from conservative circles within the music fraternity.
- The decision to confer Krishna with the prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi award by the Madras Music Academy has stirred dissent among some Carnatic musicians, leading to withdrawals from the academy's annual conference, reflecting tensions over Krishna's activism, political statements, and unconventional approach to music.
- Despite facing criticism and boycotts, Krishna's activism and advocacy for social causes have been integral to his artistic journey, resonating with a legacy of musicians who used their art as a platform for social commentary and change, challenging norms, and fostering inclusivity through music and activism.
- The Sangeet Kalanidhi Award, presented by the Madras Music Academy, is the highest honor in Carnatic music in India, recognizing exceptional talent, mastery, and lifelong contributions to the art form, with the title translating to "Treasure of Music and Art" and symbolizing immense respect for awardees.
- Established in 1942, the award is bestowed upon musicians from diverse disciplines within Carnatic music, including vocalists, instrumentalists, and composers, following a rigorous selection process to ensure deserving artists are recognized for their outstanding achievements.
- Notable recipients of the Sangeet Kalanidhi Award include legendary figures like M.S. Subbulakshmi, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, and Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, as well as contemporary artists such as Aruna Sairam and Neyveli Santhanagopalan, highlighting the award's role in celebrating the rich heritage and excellence of Carnatic music.
- The award ceremony and annual conference hosted by the Madras Music Academy serve as a platform to honor and showcase the highest standards of artistic achievement in Carnatic music, reflecting the dedication, skill, and artistry of musicians who have significantly contributed to the genre's legacy and evolution.

