India - Expanding Ties with the West

What is the issue?

The summit of Group of Seven (G7) industrial countries is an opportunity for India to expand ties with the West.

Is the West on decline?

- Since the global financial crisis of 2008, the West is perceived to be in a terminal decline.
- Various factors have only added to this view:
  - the rapid rise of China
  - deepening divisions within the West during the Trump years
  - the chaotic response in North America and Europe to the Covid-19 pandemic
- But the US president Joe Biden wants to reverse the global perception of a declining West.
- Biden also calls for the normalisation of relations with Russia, suggesting a fresh look at the ties.

What does it mean for India?

- Biden is determined to strengthen US alliances and draw India into a new global architecture.
- The other factors generating convergence between the interests of India and the West includes -
  i. the challenges from an increasingly aggressive China
  ii. the urgency of mitigating climate change
  iii. the construction of a post-pandemic international order
- Biden also made an elevation of the Quad (US, Australia, India and Japan) to the summit level recently.
- It is much about defining a new agenda for a particular geography, the Indo-Pacific, of which India is a part.

What about India's role in G7?

- This is not the first time that India is participating in the G-7.
- It is also not new to have G-7 leaders invite different countries to join them.
- But the difference this time is the conception behind UK PM Boris Johnson's invitation.
- UK , as the host, has invited leaders of India, Australia, South Africa and South Korea to the summit.
- This suggests the intention to build a coalition of leading democracies, based more broadly than the geographic West.
- India is at the very heart of this Western calculus of having a global democratic coalition.
- [India has been having strong bilateral strategic cooperation with the US, France, UK and the Quad.
- There is also the trilateral partnerships with France and Australia as well as Japan and Australia.
- India has also stepped up its engagement with the European Union.]

How significant is the West to India?

- China is trying to internationalise the Kashmir issue after the 2019 constitutional changes.
- And India has relied on Western support to fend off this effort of China.
- [The West is also supportive to India's aim to contain Pakistan's support for cross-border terrorism.]
- There is also a growing trade imbalance with China, leading to India walking away from the RCEP.
- In all, India is reluctant to integrate with the China-led Asian economic order.
- Importantly, it is also turning to the West - the US, UK, EU and others - for trade agreements.
- In essence, China is the greatest obstacle to India's global aspirations and the West is an emerging partner.

How about ties with Russia?

- Moscow has moved closer to Beijing in recent years.
- But India has been reluctant to abandon its longstanding ties with Russia.
- However, a deteriorating US-Russia relationship in recent years was a challenge to India.
- But, the renewed dialogue between Washington and Moscow has increased India's hopes now, to strengthen ties with Russia.

What are the challenges though?

- Between India and the West, there are many areas of continuing divergence.
- These range from the economic role of the state to the democratic regulation of social media and the technology giants.
- So, translating the broad convergences between India and the West into tangible cooperation require sustained negotiations.
- A productive partnership with the West helps India’s national interests and adds strength to India’s international relations.

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