

RECALIBRATING INDIA-TAIWAN TIES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - East Asia

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India and Taiwan are celebrating 25 years of their partnership. However, the growing relationship has been a low-key affair as India has been hesitant to acknowledge the improving ties in public. Though mutual efforts between Delhi and Taipei have enabled a range of bilateral agreements covering agriculture, investment, customs cooperation, civil aviation, industrial cooperation and other areas, the time has come to recalibrate India-Taiwan relations.

Creating a political framework is a prerequisite to doing this. Both partners have increasingly deepened mutual respect underpinned by openness, with democracy and diversity as the key principles for collective growth. The shared faith in freedom, human rights, justice, and rule of law continues to embolden their partnership. To make this relationship more meaningful, both sides can create a group of empowered persons or a task force to chart out a road map in a given time frame. Political will is the key.

India's has been in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. Likewise, Taiwan's handling of the pandemic and its support to many other countries underlines the need to deepen healthcare cooperation. India and Taiwan already collaborate in the area of traditional medicine. The time is ripe to expand cooperation in the field of healthcare.

Maintaining air quality has become a mammoth challenge for the Indian government and stubble burning is an important reason for severe air pollution. Taiwan could be a valuable partner in dealing with this challenge through its bio-friendly technologies. Such methods are applied to convert agricultural waste into value-added and environmentally beneficial renewable energy or biochemicals. This will be a win-win situation as it will help in dealing with air pollution and also enhance farmers' income. Further, New Delhi and Taipei can also undertake joint research and development initiatives in the field of organic farming.

India and Taiwan need to deepen people-to-people connect. Cultural exchange is the cornerstone of any civilisational exchange. It not only helps one appreciate another culture but also helps in overcoming prejudices and cultural misunderstanding. Tourism is the key tool in this exchange. However, Taiwanese tourists in India are a very small number. The Buddhist pilgrimage tour needs better connectivity and visibility, in addition to showcasing incredible India's diversity. This will accelerate the flow of Taiwanese tourists. With the Taiwan Tourism Bureau partnering with Mumbai Metro, Taiwan is trying to raise awareness about the country and increase the inflow of Indian tourists.

Trade relations have grown. India's huge market provides Taiwan with investment opportunities. Taiwan's reputation as the world leader in semiconductor and electronics complements India's leadership in ITES (Information Technology-Enabled Services). This convergence of interests will help create new opportunities. India's recent strides in the ease of business ranking not only provide Taiwan with lucrative business opportunities but also help it mitigate its over-dependence on one country for investment opportunities.

The signing of a bilateral trade agreement in 2018 was an important milestone. There are around 200 Taiwanese companies in the field of electronics, construction, petrochemicals, machine, Information and Communications Technology and auto parts operating in India. Despite the huge potential, Taiwan investments have been paltry in India. Taiwanese firms find

the regulatory and labour regime daunting with stray incidents such as the incident in the Wistron plant last year creating confusion and mistrust.

Policymakers need to coordinate better with the business community to help them navigate the regulatory and cultural landscape for better ties.

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