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Sports as a tool of engagement with Taiwan

Joint sporting events can help in reaching grassroots-level understanding among the people of both sides.

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Under India's Act East policy initiated by PM Narendra Modi, ties with SouthEast and East Asian countries have significantly strengthened in recent years. Among the most important partners for India in the region is Taiwan. However, India's engagement with Taiwan has always been constrained, owing to the One China Policy limiting diplomatic activity.

In 1995, both India and Taiwan established Trade offices as de-facto embassies to facilitate travel and other

such connections. Under President Tsai Ing-wen's first presidential term in 2016, Taiwan launched New Southbound Policy (NSP) to seek greater engagement with South, Southeast Asian countries, Australia, and New Zealand. Such geographical-specific policies have given both sides immense opportunities to adopt the Track 2 and 3 tracks of diplomacy.

One such track where India and Taiwan can cooperate is using sports to deepen the relationship beyond the diplomatic level. Sports has been one of the critical pillars of diplomacy worldwide, which brings people closer across nations and cultures.

On April 12, 2021, one of India's most prominent companies, TATA Group's technical arm TATA Consultancy Services (TCS), National Chung Cheng University (CCU) of Taiwan, and the Indian students of CCU organized a cricket match ceremony at CCU's ground. At this event, TCS Country Head for Taiwan, Mr. Karthi Madhavan, CCU President, and other university officials were present to commemorate TCS funding to the cricket team of CCU. Some of the event's highlights were the cultural performance of the Indian students of CCU and the Lion Dance to showcase the cultural vividity from both sides. Cricket is an almost unknown sport in Taiwan.



Taiwan's enthusiasm for sports is nothing new. A few years back, in 2017, Taiwan concluded a successful international multi-sport event named "Universiade." The Universiade brought athletes from around the world. By hosting such significant sports events, Taiwan has gained applause and appreciation worldwide. It has also helped in boosting Taiwan's presence in the world. Since the COVID pandemic started in late 2019, it has brought the world to a pause in several sectors, including sports activities. Even the Olympics 2020, scheduled to be held in Japan, were not spared and had to be postponed by one year. It will mostly be watched online as no foreign visitors are allowed in Japan and even in the country many people will not feel secure enough to attend physically.



Taiwan has conducted several sporting events involving people from NSP countries and also other expats and workers. Some of them include [football league](#), [basketball league](#), which are quite popular among the foreign workers and expats living in Taiwan. Supporting such sporting events focused on the NSP diaspora in Taiwan helped bring people from all walks of life together.

Cricket is one of the most popular sports in India and also several other Commonwealth countries. Students from India and other cricket-playing nations have gradually brought Cricket to Taiwan. With over 2000 Indian

diaspora members in Taiwan, Cricket naturally came with them to this country.



In 2020, when there was a worldwide lockdown, Taiwan could stand out primarily due to its ability to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Such measures helped the cricket-loving diaspora in Taiwan conduct a significant Cricket League tournament from April 25 to May 17, 2020, which got wider popularity worldwide, especially in India. The event was organized by [Taiwan Cricket](#) which organizes such tournaments. Although the format was shorter than a usual cricket match, it got the attention of an internet streaming platform based in [Mumbai, India](#). From India, Mr. Pintu Kumar, a student at National Taiwan Normal University, was part of Formosa Cricket Club, which participated in the Cricket League, mentioned that “it is for the first time, people from India and outside can see us playing from Taiwan. Thanks to Taiwan’s early COVID measures, such a tournament could occur.” The event helped showcase Taiwan as a destination where sporting activities were conducted during the pandemic. However, in 2021, such an event on a large scale has not been conducted yet. Given a recent outbreak of COVID-19 cases since mid-May 2021, all sporting events have been canceled as well.

What can India and Taiwan aim to achieve by promoting such gaming events? First, India and Taiwan can become more welcoming to several sports beyond Cricket. The first benefit would be to focus on the resources they have to help each other in different sports. It would encourage athletes from the college to study and train in mutual sport universities and facilities. Providing opportunities to the athletes will give Taiwanese and Indian athletes a unique chance to train together.

One joint training platform can be made for the sport of “Kabaddi”. Taiwan has a national team of Kabaddi, which is traditionally an Indian subcontinent’s sport. Given India’s strong track record in the game, India can become the best training ground for Taiwanese athletes who want to learn more about Kabaddi.

Second, to officially recognize ‘Taiwan Cricket’ as an official organization for conducting cricket events in Taiwan. Making it official will lead to more coordinated efforts between players and government officials for conducting other yearly events. Although it is too early to determine how much Cricket can be popular among Taiwanese, after staying in Taiwan for six years, I have seen that it has attracted attention in local media given its near resemblance to baseball, a popular sport locally.

Third, though the political situation has limited government-to-government linkages, it does prevent exploring ties in other tracks such as sports. Joint sporting events can help in reaching grassroots-level understanding among the people of both sides. It will create a genuine bonhomie between the two sides.

Sports is just another track for building connections between the two sides. However, both countries need to give a solid push to strengthen the ties.

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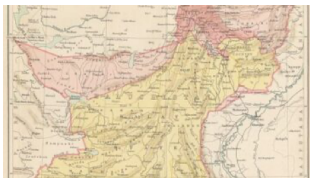


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