

India-China disengagement: Why it should not be a cause of concern for Taiwan

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On the Taiwanese cyberspace the narrative being spread by pro-China handles is that India has chosen China over Taiwan



Representational image. PTI

Hours after China, without mentioning the agreement reached with India on patrolling along the Line of Actual Control, confirmed that it had “reached a solution”, and “would work with India”, to “effectively implement the plan, India announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan during the ongoing BRICS summit.

Even though China has not even cared enough to mention the agreement by name, and the specifics of the agreement are yet to be reached at, there have been jubilations in several quarters of India. China has time and again displayed that it does not adhere to agreements, let alone to those the specifics of which are not clear, the jubilations on Indian social media have begun. What remains to be seen is the extent to which China will actually adhere to the “solution”. What is more pertinent is also to understand why China agreed to the agreement at this juncture, right before the BRICS summit. The BRICS summit this year is one with an expanded membership.

India showed its successful navigation of geopolitical tensions at the G20 last year and came up with a declaration signed by all countries — something that was not expected in several quarters of the world. India championed the cause of the Global South at the G20

as well and raised issues and proposed solutions to questions of climate change, sustainability, women-led development among a long list of others — all being of particular importance to countries of the Global South.

With an expanded membership of the BRICS, and India's successful G20 presidency along with its highest-performing current growth rates, it would reflect poorly on China if it were to be seen as constantly bullying one of the important voices of the Global South. China took at least 18 hours to come up with the announcement of the “solution”, that too in very muted terms after India announced it. Domestically, it portrays a weakening of China's position on the border, especially under a leader who wants to portray a strong image. In fact, on Chinese social media, questions have even been raised as to why China had to even think of any solution with a country like India!

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The usage of social media for psychological warfare is well known and well documented. Taiwan, which bears the maximum brunt of China's social media psychological warfare, owing to the fact that both Taiwan and China use the Chinese language (albeit one uses the traditional format and the latter uses the simplified format), knows how state narratives that cannot be stated publicly by party officials or government departments, is conveniently put out by China-sponsored handles or “little pinks”.

In Taiwanese cyberspace the narrative being spread by pro-China handles is that the “solution” with India is a sign that India can never ignore China, given China's economic and political prowess and that through this solution, India has chosen China over Taiwan. This becomes particularly interesting, as merely a day before India announced the agreement with China regarding restoration of patrolling rights, China had stated that it “lodged solemn representations” with India after the Indian government opened the third Taipei and Economic Cultural Centre (TECC).

India had been negotiating for the restoration of patrolling rights with China for quite some time. If India had any intention of throwing Taiwan under the bus, India would not have opened the third TECC. In 2024 alone, India, keen on positioning itself as an alternative for companies that are pursuing the China-plus-one strategy, has increasingly sought Taiwanese investment, owing to Taiwan's achievements in semiconductors and chip making. As of February 2024, Taiwanese companies invested approximately 44.46 billion in India, and this investment has created around 170,000 jobs in the country.

While there are no statistics for Chinese FDI in India in 2024, in 2021 Chinese investment in India was a mere \$63.18 million — starkly lower compared to Taiwan's FDI of 2024. In fact, from April 2000 to March 2024, China's contribution to India's total FDI inflow was only 0.37 per cent. India has opened more than 30 anti-dumping investigations against China in 2024, the highest number ever against a single country. China has a long history of violating Indian economic laws and dumping goods, against WTO rules. India has also imposed tariffs of up to 30 per cent on some steel products imported from China, and these will stay in place for five years.

India and Taiwan also signed a labour mobility pact this year and both sides are keen to see that it brings mutual benefits. India does not have any such agreement with China, neither does it plan on having such agreements. Indian border defences with China remain in place since the trust deficit remains high. India does not have this sort of trust deficit with Taiwan.

If anything, this year, in Vietnam, at the East Asia summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken a subtle jibe at China without mentioning it by name when he stated that peace, security and stability of the South China Sea was in the interests of the entire Indo-Pacific region. India does not have such a reason to subtly or not so subtly call out Taiwan over anything.

Disinformation from pro-China handles is also leveraging the fact that last week South Africa asked Taiwan to move its de-facto embassy, called the Taipei Liaison Office, out of the capital Pretoria, trying to paint the same fate for Taiwan in India. However, India through its diplomatic and economic actions with Taiwan has shown that it sees Taiwan as an important partner. India does not choose one country over the other to begin with, and definitely not distrusted neighbours over important economic and technological partners.

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