India's Rising Soft Power

1) Introduction
   - According to Harvard political scientist, who coined the term, soft power is the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without resorting to force or coercion.
   - Soft power lies in a country’s attractiveness and comes from three resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies.
   - India boasts an amazing variety and wealth of soft power resources.
   - Analysts say soft power has the potential “to multiply the efforts of Indian diplomacy and in this regard should be pursued as an important objective”.

2) India's Soft Power
   - India's spiritualism, yoga, movies and television, classical and popular dance and music, its principles of non-violence, democratic institutions, plural society, and cuisine have all attracted people across the world.
   - India is a civilisation which has offered refuge to cultural and religious freedoms to Jews, Parsees, Christens and Muslims.
   - The imprint of Indian civilization is the strongest throughout the world.
   - India is a country in which all major religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism co-exists which has been the strength of India's soft power.
   - India is dipping into its soft power resources in its diplomatic engagements abroad.
   - International Day of Yoga reflects yoga’s immense popularity worldwide, underscoring its richness as a soft power resource.
   - Indian Diaspora is seen as ambassadors of carriers of our soft power.
   - To project New Delhi’s soft power across world capitals, the MEA has embarked on a program to build diplomatic missions and cultural centres using the country’s diverse styles of architecture.
   - Buddhism is an important bridge between not just India and South East Asia and East Asia, but also with South Asia.
   - India’s successful Aadhaar programme which can help countries do similar things and India’s IT capability are huge source of soft power.

3) Soft Power in South East Asia
   - India’s attempts to use its soft power to revive historical links with the region appear to be bearing fruit.
   - Recent successful Indo-ASEAN artists camp in Udaipur as well as Indo-ASEAN music festival in Delhi was a bridge between the youth of India and ASEAN
   - Younger generation in India and Southeast Asia are speaking more to each other through cultural space – music, arts, games and education.
   - India’s goodwill in Southeast Asia is based on its benign approach, similar to its role in Africa, West Asia and Central Asia.
   - While yoga is gaining popularity in the ASEAN region, the Buddhist links and Buddhist circuit in India are acting as a bridge to connect the two regions.
• India’s soft power is reflected in Buddhism, yoga, revival of Nalanda University, Indian cultural centres (Jakarta, Bali, Bangkok), and joint restoration of monuments (Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos).

• **China’s Approach**
  a. Unlike China, India is not pursuing an aggressive foreign policy sidestepping local sentiments.
  b. China has a businesslike approach and Southeast Asia is key to China’s OBOR project, with little space for soft power.
  c. China’s Minzu University is offering its first master’s degree in Yoga, which signals that soft power is being deployed to reanimate China-India ties in the aftermath of the Doklam standoff.

4) **Concerns / Challenges**
- According to the "Soft Power 30" report, India did not rank even in the top 30 in terms of soft power.
- France, for instance, draws over 70 million tourists while India attracted a mere eight million last year.
- Prime international destinations such as the Taj Mahal do not have international facilities.
- The much-talked about Buddhist circuit still suffer for want of travel and infrastructure.
- ‘Incredible India’ campaign has become successful after the visa-on-arrival system, but ease of travel is still an issue.
- Both India’s film industry and the government have done little to leverage Bollywood and other regional cinema industries globally.

5) **Why India can’t rely totally on soft power?**
- India is still having difficulties in changing its neighbours’ behaviours by using soft power.
- The soft power has not helped India deal with terrorism and radicalism.
- Despite India’s growing soft power many countries are not supporting India’s permanent membership in UNSC.
- It has not helped India in WTO negotiations and not fetched FTA with EU.
- It has not stopped China opposing India’s membership to NSG.

6) **Way Forward**
- Utilize the strong cultural and civilizational potential of the Indian diaspora
- Innovation and entrepreneurship should be the soft power of choice both within the country and outside.
- India must have well organised higher education system like US which attracts lot of students into India
- Develop Indian tourism sector to a great extent which will also have economic gains.
- India should build on its strength through good governance, work towards achieving good economic growth and raise the standard of living of the common man.
- India must capitalise on the goodwill and the potential soft power it has created
- These will help in achieving greater heights in India’s soft power.

7) **Conclusion**
- India’s culture, heritage and its pluralism are its strengths.
- We have the potential to be world leaders in not only economic terms but as a free, vibrant and dynamic nation.
- India must use its soft power to leverage and accelerate its growth.