

General Studies-2; Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

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, Parses, 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 signal that soft power is being deployed to reactivate 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.