



Stormy weather awaits India in 2019

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The country faces a difficult external and internal situation. It needs to show more dexterity on the diplomatic front

- As we enter 2019, the world outlook looks gloomy.
- Global disorder is the dominant imperative.
- A global leadership vacuum is leading to chaos concerning rules governing the international order.

On different trajectories

- Nations are today working at cross-purposes across the globe. Growing tensions in the Sea of Azov (following Russia's seizure of Ukraine's ships) could well lead to a major conflagration between Russia and the West.
- China is consolidating its position in Asia.
- In addition to its strategic partnership with Russia, China has mended fences with Japan.
- India finds itself increasingly isolated in Asia as a result.
- Economic portents during 2018 for most of the world proved highly daunting.
- The most challenging was the spectre of an all embracing U.S.-China trade war.
- A decline in Britain's financial assets and of the pound sterling following Brexit, as well as signs of increasing fragility of China's economy, are newer concerns.
- India cannot hope to remain insulated from these trends.

Ties with Russia, Japan

- Coming to India's foreign policy concerns, relations with Russia and Japan could see a reset.
- The strengthening of the Russia-China strategic relationship and the recent warmth in China-Japan relations could impact India's relations with both countries.

- Notwithstanding the warmth displayed in public by the leaders of India and Russia, and India and Japan, the character of our relations with these two countries could undergo a change.
- To what extent, is yet to be seen.
- Managing relations with China will be India's top priority. India-China relations are marked by a surface calm, but this masks an intrinsic struggle for influence in Asia and even beyond.

China's outreach

- In 2018, China had initiated certain moves to create a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor on the lines of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- This year could see a further consolidation of the 'all weather friendship' of China-Pakistan.
- The prospects of India-Pakistan relations improving on the other hand, are extremely limited.
- This is making India's position here highly invidious.

Mixed challenges for India

- The outlook for India in the rest of South Asia is also mixed.
- Towards the end of 2018, India could retrieve its position in the Maldives.
- Yet, India will need to work harder in 2019 to check China from weaning away its neighbours, including Nepal as also Bangladesh, with offers of economic and military aid.
- India will also need to use all its resources to assist Bangladesh to limit the influence of radical Islamist groups there.
- Internal security, for the better part of 2018, remained on a relatively even keel.
- The more challenging internal security problems will be Kashmir and the Northeast.
- In 2018, the situation in Kashmir sharply deteriorated, and the year witnessed some of the highest levels of violence since 1989.
- The deadlock between the Jammu and Kashmir administration and militants is unlikely to be resolved.
- The consequences of this as far as 2019 is concerned could be considerable.
- The other major internal security threat that India faces in 2019 is the resurgence of ethnic sub-nationalism in the Northeast.

- It will demand sensitive and careful handling in 2019.
- Two other issues that kept the nation on the edge in 2018, i.e. farmers' and Dalit unrest, still remain unattended as 2019 begins.
- Considering the difficult external and internal situation, peace in 2019 may prove elusive.

Conclusion

- On the diplomatic front, India will need to be more dexterous. The internal situation will require to be dealt with far greater understanding.

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