



Taking a cue from Japan

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How India can bridge the Belt and Road divide with China

- As the countdown begins for the second edition of the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) later this month, Beijing is jubilant.
- Last month, China demonstrated that President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) had steamed into the heart of Europe.
- Late last month, during President Xi's Europe visit, Italy became the first G7 country to formally subscribe to the China-led BRI.
- The Chinese have interpreted Rome's decision as a historic event that revives ties between the European and Chinese civilisations.
- During his visit, President Xi also spoke about joint venture prospects in other countries, including in Africa.
- With its ties with the U.S. souring, China is making a bold move to chip away at the real or contrived fault-lines of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance.
- As in 2017, when there were plenty of red faces in China when India did not grace the BRF, there is once again a fear in Beijing that New Delhi may repeat the embarrassment.
- India had stayed out because of sovereignty concerns as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the flagship of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- In 2017, after Tokyo had decided that it needed to rebuild bridges that had collapsed following a maritime dispute over a few East China Sea islands, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe decided to send his trusted party ally, Toshihiro Nikai, to China.
- Significantly, Mr. Nikai's delegation included the head of Keidanren, Japan's Business Federation lobby — a pointer that its current misgivings apart, Japan could be open to business within the ambit of the BRI.
- Taking the cue from Japan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi can also tap an influential party heavyweight to lead an Indian non-official delegation to the BRF, along with business leaders and reputed scholars.
- A mature and pragmatic Indian response, which keeps the door open for

a future partnership with the BRI, may help keep afloat the reset achieved last year following the informal summit between Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi in Wuhan.

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