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Second Informal Summit between India and China

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This article is based on **“In search of the Wuhan spirit”**, which was published in The Hindu, on 05/10/2019. It talks about preserving the Wuhan spirit in changing geopolitical scenario.

The second informal summit (**Mamallapuram summit**) between leaders of India and China is scheduled to take place on October 2019. At Wuhan summit 2018, both sides agreed that such informal meetings will be held regularly to propel the future direction of India-China relations.

These informal meetings are aimed at ensuring **higher levels of strategic communications** between India and China.

Why Mamallapuram is chosen?

- Wuhan was picked by President Xi Jinping as the venue in 2018 to demonstrate China's economic might.
- India has chosen Mamallapuram as a symbol of **India's 'soft power'**.
- Mamallapuram is an important town of the erstwhile Pallava dynasty that ruled in parts of South India from 275 CE to 897 CE.
- It is renowned for its architecture, widely admired across the world.
- Mamallapuram and the Pallava dynasty are also historically relevant, for **the earliest recorded security pact between China and India** (in the early 8th century) that involved a Pallava king (Rajasimhan, or Narasimha Varma II), from whom the Chinese sought help to counter Tibet.

What is the significance of these informal summits?

- Informal summits have been used as **trust-building exercises**.
- **Informal meet at Wuhan** resulted in invoking of **Wuhan Spirit**, which sought to **reset** ties between India and China.

- **Wuhan Spirit** is in line with the five principles of peaceful coexistence (Panchsheel) jointly advocated by China and India in the 1950s. **Under Wuhan Spirit:**
 - Both countries agreed that they form the "**backbone**" of economic **globalisation**, and they should jointly make positive contributions to global peace and development.
 - The two nations have agreed to cooperate, for the first time ever, on a **joint project in Afghanistan**.
 - China has indicated that India's refusal to join the Belt and Road Initiative will not come in the way of economic cooperation.

Evaluation of Wuhan Spirit

- Though Wuhan summit was started with enthusiasm, however, **little has changed** as far as **India-China relations** are concerned.
- The disputed border between the two countries remains an issue of concern.
- In spite of cooperation in Afghanistan, the China-Pakistan axis has sought to sideline India from Afghanistan peace process.

The geopolitical backdrop of Mamallapuram Summit

After the Wuhan Summit, many things have changed, **altering the circumstances surrounding India-China relations**. For example:

- Due to **Trade war**, relations between China and the U.S. have sharply deteriorated.
- While in 2018, the China-Russia axis appeared to be a new strategic alignment, which has been reset to some extent by India:
 - India's relations with Russia have acquired a fresh dimension, incorporating economics alongside a longstanding military relationship.
 - **India's line of credit** to develop **Russia's Far East** has fundamentally changed the nature of India-Russia relations.
 - Also, a new triangular relationship of Russia, India and Japan, appears to be altering equations in the East Asian region.
- India also has other reasons to be more optimistic than a year ago.
 - India's relations with the U.S. have attained a new high.
 - The **Quad** (the U.S., India, Japan and Australia) has gained a new lease of life.
- China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** has also come under increasing attack, due to **debt trap diplomacy** (China taking the lease of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port for 99 years, in lieu of its debt).

Way Forward

- China will be wary of India's efforts in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.
 - India is going to conduct **“all arms integrated” exercise ‘codenamed Changthang Prahar (assault)’** in a “super high altitude” in Ladakh.
 - The reopening of the **Advanced Landing Ground** at Vijoynagar in Arunachal Pradesh for the use of military aircraft.
 - Also, a proposed major combat exercise in Arunachal Pradesh, in which the new **Integrated Battle Groups** will be seen in operation.
- Therefore, India needs to proceed with the utmost caution that **'Wuhan spirit' doesn't get undermined.**
- India must also be aware of the Chinese tactics of **PSY war** (Subduing the enemy without fighting).
- In perspective of these circumstances, India should also ensure that its engagement with China should not lead to disrupting the strategic alliances that India has forged, or strengthened, recently.

Drishti Mains Question

Changing geopolitical scenario requires India to cautiously calibrate its foreign policy with respect to China. Discuss.
