



***CLOSER INDIA TIES SHOULD BE A  
PRIORITY FOR TAIWAN***

BY SANA HASHMI

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*An earlier version of this article appeared at [The Taipei Times](#).*

The return to power of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan and the Bharatiya Janata Party in India marked a pivotal moment for advancing India-Taiwan relations.

With the DPP now in its third term and the National Democratic Alliance government in India, expectations for continuity are high. However, continuity alone might not suffice to deepen and expand this crucial partnership.

Despite recent electoral cycles and changes in leadership, significant progress in bilateral relations between Taiwan and India has been elusive.

While an [exchange](#) between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President William Lai (賴清德) on X following Modi's re-election last month showed promise, a noticeable lull since then raises concerns about sustaining earlier gains.

The prior exposure of Modi to Taiwan and former President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to India before assuming office proved beneficial.

Ministers and officials in the Tsai administration emphasized India's strategic and economic significance, laying the groundwork for bilateral

cooperation between the two countries, a momentum that appears to be lacking right now.

Lai faces multiple challenges, including domestic issues, navigating the unpredictable twists and turns in the US presidential election campaign and managing China's assertiveness.

Moreover, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lin Chia-lung (林佳龍) has not yet outlined specific foreign policy priorities.

Even though the progress in Taiwan-India relations has slowed for now, there are both challenges and opportunities for advancement, including several areas where the two governments could focus.

Economic ties between Taiwan and India show promise but remain underdeveloped relative to their global trade capacities.

Although bilateral trade has reached \$10 billion, substantial room for growth exists, particularly in sectors such as semiconductor collaboration, where Indian interest in partnerships with Taiwanese firms like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co is notable. Strengthening economic bonds is crucial for fostering deeper political cooperation.

Tourism and cultural exchanges encounter obstacles, including visa complexities and limited direct travel options due to the lack of direct connectivity. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian travelers interested in visiting Taiwan have been deterred by the lengthy visa process and layovers en route to Taiwan.

As Hong Kong becomes less favorable as a layover point, convenient and cheaper travel options to Taiwan have diminished. Improving direct connectivity and simplifying visa procedures for Indian tourists are critical steps toward unlocking the immense potential of cultural and tourism exchanges between India and Taiwan.

In terms of parliamentary exchanges, the India-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Forum, [established in 2016](#) and revived in 2020, has faced interruptions. Limited interest and lobbying efforts among

lawmakers from both countries have hindered sustained exchanges.

Remarkably, Indian Member of Parliament [Sujit Kumar](#) has been a staunch advocate of and visitor to Taiwan, providing a pathway to initiate exchanges. Revitalizing and expanding such exchanges could deepen mutual understanding and cooperation across sectors, thereby strengthening bilateral ties.

Awareness and understanding have also been stalled by incidents such as racist remarks against Indians following the [signing of a labor agreement](#) between India and Taiwan that was largely caused by a Chinese-led disinformation campaign.

However, there remains a significant lack of awareness among Taiwanese about Indians and their contributions. Bridging this gap requires fostering greater awareness and understanding between Taiwanese and Indians through cultural exchanges, educational programs and increased interactions.

These efforts can dispel misunderstandings and build mutual respect, promoting cultural diplomacy to highlight the positive aspects of their relationship and counteract misinformation.

In the absence of formal diplomatic ties, think tanks and political party dialogues play a crucial role. Initiatives such as the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation-led [India-Taiwan dialogue](#) demonstrate the potential of non-governmental engagements in deepening bilateral understanding and collaboration.

Additionally, establishing dialogues among political parties, similar to those between the DPP and Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, could foster understanding and cooperation. These efforts facilitate deeper engagements, enhance mutual trust and pave the way for substantive cooperation across various domains.

It is imperative for Taiwan's new government to reinvigorate the New Southbound Policy, with India being a key country in this initiative.

Amid China's growing assertiveness and the uncertainties of the US elections, Taiwan must avoid putting all its eggs in one basket and continue

cultivating new partnerships, with India as a top priority.

Mutual understanding of each other's needs and interests is essential for advancing ties. India must not only have expectations, but also take responsibility, recognizing that economic engagement is crucial for its own interests, while political signaling holds significance for Taiwan, especially given its challenges with an assertive China.

The segregation between economic engagement and political signaling is no longer viable; concerted efforts are necessary to achieve meaningful progress in both.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*