

Panel: China and India (Lilac & Tulip Room)

Date/Time: Wednesday, December 12, 2012 / 09:00-10:15

Talking Points for: Lt Gen PC Katoch, Council Member, United Services Institution of India

India and China are two ancient civilizations that appear different but have many similarities. Evolution of both civilizations went through strikingly similar episodes at various points of time. It is a historical coincidence that after years of war, around 3rd Century BC, a united dynasty was established in China by Shihuangdi, the First Emperor of China simultaneous to establishment of the Mauryan Empire in India that eventually had the Hindukush Mountains as the Western border. Again, the development of ancient philosophical thinking in both China and India boomed during 6th Century BC. Confucius founded Confucianism in China and Siddhartha Gautama established Buddhism in India almost simultaneously. China and India were historically the centers of the related civilization circles in Asia. In NE Asia and some Southeast Asian countries, historical influence of Chinese culture can be detected. Similarly, Indian culture can be traced in many South and SE Asian countries, even as far as Indonesia. Such cultural influences reveal the great contribution made by China and India to the world. In their long histories, both China and India were frequently invaded by alien tribes, but despite repeated foreign cultural onslaught, the backbone of the two ancient cultures, namely Confucianism in China and Hinduism in India was vigorously sustained. Buddhism marked the first step of Chinese civilization's interaction with the outside world and it became an integrated part of Chinese civilization, the value of which in Chinese civilization cannot be overemphasized. The vitality and continuity of both Chinese and Indian civilizations are exceptional in the world. In 1949, after the liberation war, new China was established, while in 1947, India won its independence. Afterwards, although different in political system, China and India took similar paths of planned economy. Today, both countries are the most populous in the world whose combined population of 2.3 billion amounts to two fifth of entire humanity. Both countries have pursued policies of reform and opening up and are fast growing economies. Development of China and India over the next decades will have great impact on the whole world.

*** The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.**

If you look at relationship between two ancient civilizations anywhere in the world over centuries, you will come across periods of ups and downs and India-China relationship is no exception. After the high of close knit brotherly relations of 1950's, estrangements did set in, the Dalai Lama had to seek refuge in India in 1959 and then there was the bitterest period of the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Whether domestic political pressure pushed the countries to war or there were other reasons, the fact is it did happen. Subsequently, relations between the two countries did improve with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988 to put in place border negotiations, high-level summits, confidence-building measures, and bilateral trade. In year 2000, complete works of Rabindranath Tagore (24 volumes) were published in China to commemorate his 140th birth anniversary indicating Chinese admiration of Indian culture.

Today, the question that keeps cropping up is whether India and China can cooperate despite their historical burden. There are apprehensions of border settlement, fear of internal interference by the other side, relations with a rapidly radicalizing Pakistan that covertly colludes with Al Qaida and Taliban and spews terror in India, plus Chinese activities in POK are real issues. Both China and India being developing economies, apprehensions about the future too are natural; like that of an arms race, desire for international status, demand for food, water, energy, plus security of supply lines of increasing energy demands.

Some feel that the confluence of geopolitical rivalry centred on notions of status and influence, volatile domestic politics and fierce attachment to territory and sense of victimhood prevails today. There has also been some speculation that 1962 may be repeated. Though there has been progress at each level, the borders have not been resolved between the two countries despite 16 rounds of talks and there are signs of instability along the LAC, which is a worrying sign even if happenings do not add up to serious deterioration of relations. However, violence is avoidable with careful border management. The bilateral trade has shot up to \$75 billion already but is heavily in favour of China with trade deficit in excess of \$20 billion. This needs course correction as the mutual agreement was for trade on 50:50.

*** The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.**

Bilateral trade is likely to rise to \$120 billion by 2015. CBMs have been ongoing but serious discussion on nuclear weapons and naval CBMs is considered essential.

The legacies of the past will remain with us and cannot be ignored, but it appears that India and China are learning to manage those legacies. Economic power does translate into military power. The two countries need not get into an arms race although the combination of growing economic and military power increases global ambitions and a desire for greater international status. Additionally, economic growth implies larger demands of resources. Both India and China will increasingly import their oil, coal, and natural gas requirements and are already foraging for energy in Africa, the Gulf, Central Asia, Latin America and Canada but this again should not necessarily lead to clash between the two.

China and India have 124 and 162 million hectares of arable land respectively. China employs more modern farming techniques and India has larger farming area. Cooperation in agriculture can be beneficial for both. There is also much scope to discuss availability of fresh water supplies. India and China may be in a position to cooperate on energy. China has perhaps the leading clean coal technologies in the world, which India needs and China has invested massively in alternative energies, which again India needs – and could get it at cheaper rates than from anywhere else. Many may not be aware that when the UNSC membership was offered to India in mid 20th Century, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave up the same to China saying China being Big Brother must get the membership first. Perhaps China may now support India's UNSC membership having acknowledged India's aspirations to play an active role in the UN and international affairs and that China may consult and cooperate with India on UN reforms. China has already welcomed India's presence in the East Asian Summit and may support India's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization too. There are ample grounds for China-India cooperation, this being the Asian Century. It would be good to look at a wide-ranging, institutionalized form of long-term cooperation. As economic power shifts increasingly to Asia and affects global political equations, it would be prudent for China and India to jointly address all issues

*** The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.**

including security.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.