Interaction with a Delegation from the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing

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Institute of Chinese Studies,

Delhi

Prof. Patricia Uberoi, Vice-Chairperson and Prof. Alka Acharya, Director, ICS welcomed the five-member delegation from the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Beijing, headed by GuoXianggang (Senior Research Fellow, CIIS). The other delegates included Shi Ze (Senior Research Fellow, CIIS), Ma Jiali, (Senior Research Fellow, China Reform Forum), Ms. Ren Jia, (Senior Research Fellow, YASS) and Yang Chenxi (Assistant Research Fellow, CIIS).

‘On a Learning Expedition’ – One Belt, One Road (OBOR)

The visit of the delegation was based on the initiative of preparing the Chinese Government to better understand the responses to and views of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) initiative launched by China in 2013. As one delegate put it, ‘it is an unprecedented initiative’, mandated by the express instruction of President Xi Jinping, the first such major foreign policy initiative deliberated not only by domestic economic and commercial constituencies, but with participation from various foreign countries.
This initiative is grounded on Xi Jinping’s three principles of foreign policy:
- China will not go out of its sphere of influence,
- China will not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and
- China will not seek to exercise hegemony.

The main focus of the visit was to promote the idea of the Silk Roads initiative, including the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), to seek suggestions from India, to counter the Western criticism of the OBOR having no concrete proposals to show, and to address and explain what China was hoping to achieve. In fact it was a ‘learning expedition’ to interact and exchange views regarding this OBOR strategy.

Mr. Shi Ze, the main speaker expounded that “the OBOR is the main crux of China’s evolving foreign policy in the neighboring and surrounding countries through economic diplomacy, economic cooperation and people to people exchanges” under Xi Jinping. He also noted that China’s economic role was shifting from being a trading partner to becoming an investment partner. The OBOR aimed to achieve mutual benefits, collective responsibility and shared destiny. These three mutual interests are distinct from the European Community/Union counterpart, as it involves both Asian and Eurasian countries. It is important to note that China’s goals through the OBOR are open to evolving through debates and discussion, the ‘construction of ideas’, and in different phases (initial, middle and completion) with contributions from different participating countries and the freedom for any country to either join or stay out.
Features of OBOR

- Silk Roads on land (Central, South and West Asia)
- Maritime Silk Road (Southeast & South Asia)
- From East to West (Asia to Eurasia)
- A Model for South-South Cooperation– presently involves 16 countries, most of which are developing countries at different levels of development. At the same time, OBOR is not confined to these countries only.
- Six economic corridors might be highlighted within the OBOR framework
  1. to the north - China, Russia and Mongolia
  2. the Eurasia Bridge
  3. connecting China with West Asia through Central Asia
  4. the BCIM Economic Corridor (The Greater Mekong Sub-region and BCIM will also link Yunnan with the Silk Road)
  5. the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
  6. the Maritime Economic Corridor from China to Southeast Asia

India and China, being the two largest countries and economies share greater responsibilities. The OBOR initiative also involves many non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and private agencies.

The ‘spirit’ of the OBOR is the same as in the case of the ancient Silk Roads. These include

- peace and friendship
- opening up and interaction
- mutual study and mutual construction
- mutual benefits and mutual exchanges between peoples

The benefits of the New Silk Roads/OBOR, include

- infrastructure development,
- trade and investment
- cooperation between enterprises and industry
- cooperation for energy and resources
- cooperation in the ecology and environment fields
• financial cooperation
• maritime cooperation
• urbanization
• modernization (in terms of economic development, agricultural techniques and innovation)

Initiatives to promote the OBOR

Shi Ze, the lead speaker, also highlighted the initial success of the initiative:

• agreements signed with Kazakhstan and Russia (especially with regard to mining) and with Kuwait
• setting up of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with US$40 billion contributed by China to the Silk Road fund separately
• of the US$500 billion proposed to be invested in the Silk Road initiatives over the next five years, 30 per cent would be invested in the countries participating in this project with the possibility of this amount increasing still further.

With the expected increase in China’s domestic market, surrounding countries too will benefit greatly.

Mainly, China would like to move from being a trade partner to investment partner.

DISCUSSION

During the discussion, in response to a question on security as a factor in the OBOR initiative, the Chinese delegates revealed that a White Paper was forthcoming soon on the entire Silk Road initiative. Security was certainly a core issue among most would-be member countries but the security aspects had hitherto been dealt with on separate platforms.

To a query about Indonesia’s plan to become the ‘world’s maritime axis’ and if this would be a challenge to the Chinese Maritime Silk Road initiative, the Chinese side was rather dismissive. Indonesia did not have the wherewithal to function as such according to one of the visitors.
On questions raised by the chair on the OBOR, if it was just another idea among many that the Chinese have come up with and of its need and utility as a connectivity project when there were other such projects run by the Chinese in the same regions, the reply was that China had a role to play as a responsible country, and this initiative was part of a process of taking the “opening up” process into a new era.

In reference to a question of any other trade entry points considered by China into India, apart from the BCIM, the Chinese acknowledged that though it is not included in the six corridors mentioned, a Russia-China-India corridor through Xinjiang could be discussed for energy and trade flows.

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