

Special lecture

India China Relations: The Way Forward

Speaker: **H.E. Mr. Sun Weidong**, Ambassador of China to India

Chair: Amb. Ashok K. Kantha, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies

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Venue: Zoom Meeting

The theme of the lecture, “India China Relations: The Way Forward” was set in the backdrop of the current dynamics and future trajectory of India-China engagement which is poised at a perilous juncture after the June 15 clashes between Indian and Chinese military along the LAC and one of the most difficult and challenging phases in India-China relations. In his introductory remarks, Amb. Ashok Kantha explained that over the last three decades India and China have followed a policy of compartmentalising the boundary questions and other outstanding issues, and not let these differences come in between the development of the relations. But this policy has now run its course. He further noted that differences between India and China have turned into contentious discord and are adversely impacting the relations. Moreover, Amb. Kantha expressed that if we must take forward the India-China relations in a positive trajectory, both the countries will have to make progress on accumulated issues and irritants, as merely managing the issues would not do anymore. Restoration of the status quo ante before the Galwan incident is the need of the hour. He also highlighted that India and China must clarify and confirm LAC and move towards a common understanding on LAC.

H.E Mr Sun Weidong began by noting that this year marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and India. The past 70 years witnessed an extraordinary journey. With the joint efforts of both sides, the two countries have established a Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. Especially in recent years, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held two informal summits and reached important consensus. They emphasized that China and India are each other's development opportunities and stable factors in the current international landscape. The speaker highlighted the need to strengthen the closer developmental partnership between the two countries. He emphasised that under the guidance of the consensus reached by the two leaders, China and India have deepened exchanges and cooperation in various fields.

Furthermore, he asserted that China-India relations have never stopped moving forward despite differences. The coordination in major international and regional affairs has been continuously enhanced and the two sides have always been seeking solutions through dialogue and consultation. He emphasised the need for adherence to the strategic guidance of leaders from both countries. He highlighted the importance and practical significance of

common development through friendly cooperation and handling differences through dialogue and consultation to push forward the sound development of India China relations.

He addressed the Galwan Valley Incident in the western sector of the China-India boundary and termed it an “an unfortunate incident”. He informed that immediately after the incident, the two sides conducted dialogues through military and diplomatic channels. Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held telephone conversations with Indian External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval respectively. The two sides also held four rounds of Corps commander-level talks and three meetings under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on China-India Border Affairs (WMCC). With the joint efforts of both sides, the border troops have disengaged in most localities. The situation on the ground is de-escalating and the temperature is coming down.

Addressing the concerns of the scholars from Indian think tanks after the Galwan Valley incident and belief of scholars that this will be a "turning point" to change or even reverse China-India relations he said, “I have a different idea on this.” He referred to the five points he had made in an earlier speech:

1. First, China and India should be partners rather than rivals
2. Second, China and India need peace rather than confrontation
3. Third, both countries need to pursue win-win cooperation rather than a zero-sum game
4. Fourth, both countries need to build trust rather than suspicion
5. Fifth, China-India relations should move forward rather than backward

Furthermore, he outlined the three the basic national conditions which of China and India as the two largest developing neighbours remain unchanged.

1. First, the orientation of China and India being partners remains unchanged
2. Second, friendly cooperation and common development remains unchanged
3. Third, the general structure that China and India cannot live without each other remains unchanged.

He said, “these three "unchanged" are our basic judgment on the current China-India relations. It is based on this judgment that China's basic policy towards India remains unchanged.” He urged both sides to grasp the fundamental interests of the two countries and their peoples, stick to friendly cooperation and properly handle differences to bring the bilateral relations back to the normal track.

Moving ahead

He suggested three key issues that need to be straightened to move China-India relations forward:

1. China is committed to peaceful development, and it is not a "strategic threat" to India
2. China firmly upholds its sovereignty and meanwhile, China will never engage in aggression or expansion
3. China advocates win-win cooperation and opposes "zero-sum game"

First, he emphasised that “China is committed to peaceful development, and it is not a "strategic threat" to India.” To safeguard world peace and promote common development has always been the fundamental goal of China's diplomacy. The Chinese people believe in peace and harmony, and value sincerity and integrity. There is no gene for seeking hegemony or resorting to military power in Chinese people's blood. China has a long history as the most powerful country in the world, but it never colonized other countries. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China over 70 years ago, China has always pursued good-neighbourly friendship, sought development with neighbours and worked to make the pie of cooperation bigger. “No matter how developed China may become, we will follow the path of peaceful development and will never seek hegemony or expansion”, he said.

He explained how China and India are both at a critical period of national development and rejuvenation and both countries need to concentrate on their development and achieve rejuvenation. This historic mission will take decades and hence "Dragon-Elephant Tango" is the only correct choice for the two sides. Highlighting the efforts of leaders to increase peace and cooperation, he referred to the 1988 “ice-breaking trip” of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China. He also quoted Mr Deng Xiaoping made to highlight that development is the common task facing the two countries. "Only when China and India have developed, will a real Asian century emerge", "If China and India are developed, we can say that we have made our contributions to mankind".

Referring to the challenges posed by COVID19 he said, "I really feel that the invisible virus, rather than China, is the "threat" facing India” and suggested that China and India should work together to overcome these challenges. He added that it is “short-sighted and harmful to deny the long history of peaceful co-existence between China and India and to portray our friendly neighbour for thousands of years as an "opponent" or a "strategic threat" due to temporary differences and difficulties”.

On the second key issue, he said, "China firmly upholds its sovereignty and meanwhile China will never engage in aggression or expansion” and asserted that the “rights and wrongs of the Galwan Valley incident are very clear.” He emphasised that China has the right to safeguard its own sovereignty and territorial integrity like any other country. He added that “the label of "expansionist “cannot be pinned on China” as China has never claimed any land outside its own territory. While highlighting peaceful resolutions of other boundary issues by China, he emphasised on joint efforts, dialogue and negotiation, strengthening dialogue and communication, and open military and diplomatic communication to resolve the boundary issues.

Speaking about the Taiwan, Xizang, Hong Kong and the South China Sea, H.E. Sun Weidong emphatically pointed out that Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Xizang affairs are China's internal affairs and bear on China's sovereignty and security. He added that China doesn't interfere in other country's domestic affairs, it allows no external interference, and never trades its core interests. He further highlighted the need to correctly understand each other's strategic intentions, adhere to the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and respect and accommodate each other's core interests and major concerns.

Third, China advocates win-win cooperation and opposes "zero-sum game". H.E. Sun Weidong asserted that China has never exported refugees, let alone wars. Explaining how China and India's development and economies are intertwined together he argued that the forced decoupling of the Chinese and Indian economies is against the trend and will only lead to a "lose-lose" outcome. Pointing towards India's steps to curb Chinese imports he argued that the economic and trade exchanges between China and India should be a positive cycle of mutual accomplishment. It should not become a "knockout" nor a "zero-sum game" that deliberately suppresses others.

Equating China India relations with an exquisitely crafted glass, he emphasised the need to handle the relations cautiously, calmly and rationally, conform to the international trend, always look forward and move forward, and resolutely avoid the whirlpool of suspicion and confrontation caused by miscalculation of the situation.

During the Q&A session, responding to the questions on the number of Chinese soldiers killed during the Galawan valley clash, the speaker avoided quoting numbers and said that "the right and wrong of the Galwan valley incident is very clear and I must make it very clear that the responsibility is not on the Chinese side." His response indicated that Indian soldiers crossed the LAC and broke the consensus reached earlier resulting into the clash. He reiterated the same while responding to another question and asserted that it was Indian troops the crossed LAC and provoked and violently attacked the Chinese officer while Chinese were defending themselves.

When asked about Chinese reluctance to identify the LAC and the map, H.E. Sun Weidong said this issue should be solved through peaceful negotiations for a solution which is mutually acceptable for both sides; until then, both sides should maintain peace and tranquillity along with the border areas.

Moreover, when asked about India indicating that China has made new claims beyond the 1962 claim he said On the northern bank of Pangong Lake, China's traditional customary boundary line is in accordance with LAC. There is no such case as China has expanded its territorial claim.

Responding to the question on snag in LAC clarification process since 2002 he said if one side unilaterally delimits LAC as per its own understanding during negotiations, that could create new disputes, would be a departure from the original purpose of clarification. He hoped for continued cooperation between India and China on mutually agreed settlement based on the principles agreed in 2005.