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Dragon and Elephant: Complicated Neighbourhood

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Year 2010 marks sixty years of diplomatic relationship between India and China. Though the relations between the two go back to ancient times, the period since 1950 till present is mainly fraught with boundary dispute, which also led to a short-lived war in 1962. But in recent times, both sides have successfully attempted to normalize the bilateral relationship, mainly driven by the mounting bilateral trade. Although strengthening economic relationship has overshadowed other areas of conflict, that doesn't provide any space for complacency, particularly on Indian side of the fence.

Amongst the major areas of conflict, the most important one is relating to the boundary dispute. While on the Western frontier, some part of Kashmir region is under Chinese occupation, on the Eastern side of frontier, the dispute relates to McMahon Line. India treats that as the Line of Actual Control (LAC) but China refuses to recognize it, even though it recognizes the same McMahon Line with Myanmar. Many attempts have been made to resolve the boundary dispute but results have been very modest. In 2003, Prime Ministers of both countries agreed to appoint Special Representatives (SR) to discuss and find a solution to the dispute. Also, during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's India visit in 2005, Beijing and New Delhi agreed on broad parameters to resolve the border dispute.

This gave political mandate to the SRs. Despite above efforts, the recently concluded 14th round of talks between the SRs in Beijing, failed to produce anything substantial, apart from the SRs sharing the respective political and strategic concerns of their nations. The bone of contention, other than border issue, is both nations' respective relationships with the third countries. While India is irked by strategic relationship enjoyed by China

and Pakistan, China on the other hand, is anxious by growing Indo-US proximity. The main reason for India's worry is Beijing's defence and nuclear assistance to Pakistan and also Chinese presence in what India calls Pak Occupied Kashmir (PoK), by way of 'infrastructure building.' Moreover, since two years now, China has started issuing stapled visas to Indians domiciled in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, thus challenging India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In addition to this, China's overtures to Nepal and infrastructural assistance to Sri Lanka provide substance to India's fears of 'String of Pearls' phenomenon. Added to this, the upstream damming of trans-boundary Rivers (Sutlej and Tsangpo-Brahmaputra) by China, and that too without intimating or consulting downstream nations (in this case India), contradicts the "Peaceful Rise of China" doctrine. This arrogance of dragon is rooted in its sheer economic might and lately acquired defence capabilities.

Recent visit to India by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was expected to clear the air on above issues and strengthen the partnership in various areas of strategic convergence. But unfortunately, it did little to lift Indian unease over border dispute and Sino-Pak relations. The joint communiqué fell short of condemning 26/11 Mumbai attacks and calling on Pakistan to control terrorism, even though "both sides agreed to combat terrorism in all its forms through joint efforts."

Notwithstanding this, what has tied together New Delhi and Beijing is trade. Wen brought with him a business delegation of over 300 executives, largest ever by any leader to any country. On very first day of his visit, business deals worth over \$ 16 billion were signed. Presently, annual bilateral trade is about \$ 60 billion. Both have set a new target of \$ 100 billion by 2015. Here too, India's concern about its increasing trade deficit has been met by mere assurances by Wen on opening Chinese markets for Indian IT, Pharmaceuticals and engineering goods sectors.

Being world's two most populous nations and fastest growing economies, India and China share lot in common. Cooperation between the two has been evident on international fora and issues like WTO, Climate Change, reforms in international financial institutions, and groupings like G20, BRIC and RIC. Here again, Chinese gesture falls short of clearly endorsing India's bid for permanent membership in UN Security Council, with joint communiqué stating "China understands and supports India's aspiration to play a greater role in the UN, including in the Security Council." All other veto members of UNSC, including the US President Obama lately, have unambiguously endorsed India's permanent admission to the body.

The Sino-India relationship is a tightrope walk. Careful orchestration of policies on both sides is need of the hour. Notwithstanding coordination and cooperation on various regional and international issues, both India and China have different visions for an ideal Asia and the ideal world. While India envisages both a multipolar world and a multipolar Asia, China envisions a multipolar world and a unipolar Asia. But being a bigger, more powerful neighbour and a responsible global power, China should understand and address the legitimate concerns of India and stop treating it as a rival. It will not only reduce the

scope for any outside interference but will also be a giant leap forward in achieving everlasting peace and security in the region. After all, both sides agree on the fact that there is enough space in the world for both Dragon and Elephant to grow peacefully.