

India, China See 'Window Of Strategic Opportunity'

by Mary Burdman

During the pivotal, crisis-ridden year of 1998, Lyndon LaRouche pointed to the emergence of the "survivors' bloc" of nations. These nations, especially the Eurasian giants Russia, China, and India, would act, LaRouche said, to defend themselves from the cataclysm that U.S. financial and military policy was imposing on the world. Despite go-slow tendencies, the "survivors' bloc" nations have been moving since then to protect their fundamental national interests. Among the most dramatic recent developments are the decisive moves by India and China—who together include one-third of humanity—to clear the decks of historic conflicts and move on to a new level of cooperation.

The turning point was the historic visit of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to China in June, as New Delhi's Minister of External Affairs Yashwant Sinha said in a remarkable speech delivered on Nov. 22. In the Admiral R.D. Katari Memorial Lecture in New Delhi, Sinha said that Vajpayee's visit "marked the beginning of a new phase in the India-China relationship." Both nations "look upon the next 20 years as a window of strategic opportunity to raise the living standards of their peoples." If they can achieve a "quantum jump" in their relations, and overcome "a deficit of trust," the two countries can "move towards their shared vision of a constructive and cooperative partnership." Vajpayee in China "represented a major step forward in that direction," Sinha said.

India and China, between them, have some 1 billion people living in some degree of poverty, some of it terrible. Both nations urgently need to develop large-scale water and energy, transport, and social infrastructure. "India's fundamental national goal is the pursuit of a better quality of life for its people," Sinha said. "What we seek the most is economic progress and prosperity, the development of art, culture, literature, and sports, and the emergence of a plural and multifaceted society that utilizes the natural talents and versatility of our people to the full. I believe China also has a similar motivation. Peace and stability in the neighborhood is of critical importance to both of us, in order to be able to pursue these goals, and it is in this context that we must see India-China relations over the long term."

'Paying Great Attention' in Beijing

Beijing responded warmly to Sinha's speech. Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said Nov. 25 that China is

paying "great attention" to what Sinha said. "We extend our welcome and appreciation of the speech," and China is satisfied with the positive growing momentum of Sino-Indian ties, Liu said.

The next day, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing met with Indian Ambassador Nalin Surie, to express his appreciation of Sinha's China policy statement. There are "great changes" taking place in the international situation, and great opportunity for development of Sino-Indian relations, Xinhua cited Li Zhaoxing. "I am confident in the future development of bilateral relations between China and India."

These developments are "very positive," Prof. Ma Jiali of Beijing's Institute of Contemporary International Relations, one of China's top-level scholars of India, told *EIR* on Dec. 10. "Relations between China and India have been improving—the result of efforts by both sides, especially since India does not now consider China as a threat." India's view of China, he said, has "become positive." The assessment in New Delhi is that China is focussing on its own national construction, and cannot pose a threat to India for at least the coming 15 years, Ma Jiali said. The speech by Yashwant Sinha was "very important." Also, bilateral trade is expanding faster even than projected. This is going on in the context of growing cooperation among Russia, China, and India, both on the government level and among policymakers and scholars, Professor Ma said.

A South Asian banker with close ties to both nations told *EIR* recently that China and India are working "to create a totally new structure of relations, based on their mutual interests." The two sides want to make the border question "history," and move on to immediate issues such as expanding trade and economic ties, and to establish a "balance between Asian countries and the United States," he said. The U.S. dominance of economic and strategic affairs in the Asia-Pacific region is a big problem for India and China, the banker noted. The two nations "want to be able to indicate to Washington that it cannot do much in this region by itself, but would have to consult both of them. . . . There is an increasing understanding between India and China on this."

This was exactly the point made publicly by former Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, at the Boao Forum for Asia, held in Hainan, China on Nov. 3. Gujral, who made leading efforts to stop the U.S. war against Iraq, called on Asian leaders to make "creative initiatives to build an effective structure of Asian peace and stability in the spirit of the UN Charter, which endorses a regional security system." As a first step, he urged the Boao Forum to "deliberate if [the] widespread military presence of America would [at all] enhance Asian security." Gujral said that "a paradigm shift" in the current American strategic policies is needed. Identifying the "disturbing security doctrine . . . [of] pre-emptive wars" as a key factor behind the current uncertainties in Asia, he said it was time now for Asians to "collectively meet [the] challenges of destabilization."



New Delhi's Minister of External Affairs Yashwant Sinha (center) used a New Delhi lecture on Nov. 22 to point to "The beginning of a new phase in the India-China relationship." Said Sinha, the two nations "look upon the next 20 years as a window of strategic opportunity to raise the living standards of their peoples."

Vajpayee's Initiative on the Border

To do this, India and China must transform their relations. A key to achieving this strategic goal, is to resolve their long-standing border dispute, which originated in British imperial adventures into Tibet and Central Asia a century ago. Despite the fact that large pieces of territory—and even the alignment of the Line of Actual Control in some areas of extreme terrain—are still disputed, Indian-Chinese relations along the disputed boundary have been peaceful and even cordial for years now.

Until Vajpayee went to China, policy in both capitals was to continue the slow, detailed—and generally unproductive—negotiations on the boundary, while trying to move forward on other, more important issues. But that has changed. Now, the border issue is what the Germans call a "*Chefsache*" (to be dealt with from the top), and high-level special representatives—Indian Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and Chinese Executive Vice-Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo—were appointed.

After their first meeting Oct. 23-24 in New Delhi, Vajpayee launched a new initiative. Speaking to a Combined Commanders Conference of the Indian military on Nov. 1, the Prime Minister announced that a "final resolution of the boundary question will release considerable military energies and finances for other more purposeful activities." It is "therefore a strategic objective, and to achieve it, we should be willing to take some pragmatic decisions. . . . The decision of the two Governments to appoint Special Representatives to discuss the boundary question from a political perspective was a particularly significant measure."

The official Chinese *People's Daily* had already published an extensive, positive commentary on the Special Representatives' meeting, which concluded: "Under the present compli-

cated world situation, men of vision of the two countries have come to realize that developing stable pragmatic relations . . . is not only helpful to the two countries to concentrate their resources on economic construction, but also is conducive to maintaining peace and stability in the Asian region."

'Breaking Out of the Past'

As Sinha said in his Nov. 22 speech, both sides realize that "the time has perhaps come to deal with some of those outstanding issues in a determined manner, without postponing tough decisions for the next generation. We believe the relationship has reached a level of maturity where we can discuss those issues with a greater sense of urgency."

When India and China resolve the border issue, it "will also send a powerful signal to the rest of the world that India and China have broken out of the shackles of the past," Sinha said.

Another break with the past was the first-ever joint naval exercise held by India and China in the East China Sea off Shanghai, on Nov. 14. The two navies had begun exchange visits in 2000, but had never before held joint exercises. These were planned during the June visit, and officially confirmed on Nov. 6, when the Indian Navy announced that a naval task force had set sail for Shanghai. The task force of three ships, commanded by Vice Adm. O.P. Bansal and Rear Adm. R.P. Suthan, with 672 sailors aboard, was to conduct search-and-rescue exercises with People's Liberation Naval units; the Indian Navy called it a "stepping stone in enhancing interoperability between the two navies."

The "non-traditional security" exercises were aimed to protect maritime trade in a region where piracy is a fast-increasing danger. The South China Sea and Malacca Straits are crucial for maritime traffic from South Asia, Southeast

Asia, and all the way to Northeast Asia. While en route, Vice-Admiral Bansal told the Press Trust of India (PTI) that there is a real threat that terrorists might take dramatic actions such as hijacking a supertanker or ships carrying sensitive cargo. This requires enhanced cooperation and coordination among navies in the region, he said.

In Shanghai, Bansal told PTI that “high-level political, military contacts, and discussions with the Chinese leadership and military has led to this visit. . . . It signals a growing interest in one another, and also a realization that we need to understand one another and cooperate in the new security environment that prevails in this part of the world, . . . and also the international environment.”

The exercises were hailed on both sides as a total success. Almost at the same time, a high-level Indian Army team was in China, continuing ongoing military exchanges between the two sides. This time, the Indian officers made the first-ever visit by an Indian military delegation to Tibet, a critical confidence-building measure. China and India are also considering holding a joint air force operation, involving Sukhoi 27 fighter jets of China’s People’s Liberation Army and the Indian military’s Sukhoi 30 MKI war planes.

In another demonstration of warming relations, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—the leading non-Communist organization—on a good will visit to New Delhi Nov. 24-25, called for increasing exchanges among youth and political and non-government institutions. In discussions with Prime Minister Vajpayee, Jia Qinglin said that 2004 will be the 50th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, jointly formulated by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. Jia said that it is of “realistic significance” to carry forward the spirit of these principles, and the two agreed to a joint celebration next year.

Trade Sets New Record

In January 2002, then-Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji was in India, and urged that the two nations rapidly triple their bilateral trade—then worth only some \$3 billion. This goal is now in sight. Already this year, trade will surpass \$7 billion, and rise to \$10 billion worth in 2004. In the first nine months of this year, bilateral trade was up almost 55% from the year before. Most dramatic is the fast increase of Indian exports to China, which increased by 85.3% during that time. India, which had been unduly concerned about the impact of imported Chinese consumer products, now has a favorable trade balance with China, due to increasing Chinese imports of iron and steel, ores, fuels, and machinery.

The two nations have agreed to take things further, by setting up a “Joint Study Group on Economic Cooperation.” This was confirmed when Vajpayee met his Chinese counterpart, Wen Jiabao, during the ASEAN nations summit in Thailand in mid-October. Vajpayee told the press that “my meet-

ing with the Chinese Premier touched on the substantive forward movement in our bilateral relations since our last meeting [in June]. To continue the process, we have agreed to expedite establishment of a joint study group on economic cooperation.”

There is another, very important implication to these developments, which is the potential for easing the 50-year-long, bloody confrontation between India and Pakistan. Pakistan and China have an “all-weather” friendship and close military ties. Before the Chinese-Indian exercises, the Chinese and Pakistani navies held joint exercises in “non-traditional security” near Shanghai in late October.

However, in recent years, China has taken a balanced approach to the Subcontinent, calling on both sides to peacefully resolve their conflict over Kashmir, which has cost some 100,000 lives. Amidst the new phase in Indian-Chinese relations, Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf visited China beginning Oct. 31. This was Musharraf’s first meeting with the new Chinese government of President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, although the less powerful Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali had visited in March. In what was likely a reflection of the security concerns of China, Musharraf stressed in his public statements in Beijing at the Boao Forum, how Pakistan is effectively fighting against terrorism.

Implications for Pakistan

Islamabad’s decades-long ties with the “Afghansi” networks, who continue to play a key role in worldwide terror operations, and to the Taliban, are well known, and its ongoing collaboration with U.S. military operations in Afghanistan have raised many questions among Eurasian nations. Musharraf said Pakistan is gathering effective intelligence on al-Qaeda, and has deployed many troops along its border with Afghanistan—the center of drugs, arms, and terror operations in the Eurasian region. Bringing the chaos in Afghanistan under control, is a key security issue for western China, as well as for the nations of Central Asia, Russia, India and Iran. It is also notable, in terms of Pakistan’s overall orientation, that the government has *not* yielded to heavy U.S. pressure, to send troops to Iraq.

The China-India border question also has big implications for Pakistan. China’s approach with India, is to make the current Line of Control the border, and India would agree with this. “No one is wants to re-start negotiating where the border goes,” a well-informed South Asian analyst told *EIR* at the end of November. “Also, this is meant to stop Pakistan from meddling.” Pakistan had finalized its disputed border with China soon after independence, and the two nations built the famous cross-border Karakoram Highway. The China-Pakistan border, however, is still involved in the fraught Indian-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir. Were India able to end its dispute with China, this could contribute to eventually resolving the fight between India and Pakistan.