

Not A Win-Win Game

Amistrust-tempered relationship. and it cannot be otherwise despite Mr Wen Jiabao's diplomatic smile and warm hand-shake. The suspicion of each other, embedded by the colonial legacy and perpetrated by successive governments of both countries—India and China—over the last five decades has prevented them to move forward together and cement their bonds in an attempt to promote genuine partnership. They never tried to develop each other's trust with sincerity. Then developing such trust cannot be accomplished in the abstract, it has to be concrete and based on cordial acts of mutual goodwill.

Unlike Obama's discovery of new India, Chinese premier Mr Wen Jiabao came all the way to New Delhi to deal with an old India, still living in the nineteenth century and refusing to settle the boundary question on China's terms. Just on the eve of Wen's all important 3-day sojourn in New Delhi, the Chinese Ambassador to India Zhang Yan was candid enough to admit the fragility of India-China ties which could be damaged easily beyond repair. The core issue is border and China has not changed its India policy since the 1962 border war, notwithstanding appreciable improvement in bilateral trade in recent years. No doubt India-China trade is soaring, and it will continue to grow in the globalised market culture. But for the Chinese trade is a different issue, having very little potential to undo the colonial mindset that crops up again and again, creating new hurdles and controversies, to the detriment of at least 2.3 billion people on the planet earth.

For one thing Russia and China, which were hostile to each other during a significant part of the cold war days, as Beijing would always portray the former Soviet Union as social-imperialist, providing food for thought to pro-China communists across the globe, have come to realise in the changed geo-political context, the importance of each other's strengths to benefit both. No, it is not really the case for India and China. They talk of change for the sake of talk. Cheap Chinese consumer goods that now flood Indian markets are no answer to the unresolved question left by history.

Despite allowing Indian pilgrims to visit the holy Manas Sarovar in Tibet once a year it is Tibet that precisely stands in the way of lasting peace and stability in the region. That China sometimes deliberately create some irritants to expedite discussions on border is a fact of life. They have been issuing stapled visas to Kashmiris for the last two years without showing any valid reasons. It's not known how they are treating the Kashmiris of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. In simple language they have some compulsions to please their trusted friend Pakistan by not recognising Jammu and Kashmir as an inalienable part of India.

Meanwhile, China created an international outcry against Nobel Peace Prize that was awarded to 55-year-old Liu Xiaobo who is still serving a 11-year sentence for raising voice against the communist barbarity to suppress freedom of speech and democratic aspirations. Human Rights activists across the world saw nothing wrong in the prize though in most cases the West politicises the peace prize. Prof Liu, being the co-author of "Charter 08" and a prominent leader of 1989 Tiananmen Square protest march showed enough courage to defy the iron heels of the Chinese Communist Party and the Security forces. What matters in international diplomacy is business interests. So both Pakistan and Russia boycotted the Nobel Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony on December 10—the World Human Rights Day—to oblige Beijing. Though India managed to exhibit a bold showing alongwith America and its allies, by participating in the event, New Delhi lost no time to retreat a bit by

downplaying the ceremonial function as a minor episode having very little impact on bilateral relations between New Delhi and Beijing.

For China boundary is the real issue and it will remain so even if there is a regime change in Beijing, the possibility of which seems remote. In the yester years both communists and Kuomintang were on the same wave length when it was the question of Tibet. Today Taiwanese nationalists and mainland communists do not differ on the Tibet issue and the Dalai Lama as well. After all the Chinese communists like their former Soviet counterparts are nationalist to the core while traditionally feeling easy to subjugate revolutionary internationalism to their narrow foreign policy interests. In the end what all they can do is to further advance trade and economic co-operation hoping for a win-win situation despite China's huge trade surplus.

For all practical purposes Wen's 3-day visit was a low-key affair even by Indian standards though the focus was mainly on business and global market. Incidentally this year marks 60 years of India-China diplomatic relations and Mr Wen didn't go beyond the ritualistic political utterance of 'friendship and cooperation'. After multi-billion dollar deals with US and French companies, corporate India looked buoyant because of China's eagerness to open and signing of trade agreements worth US\$ 16 billion. Quite expectably the Tibetans in exile, demonstrated to make the voice of 'Independent Tibet' heard but nobody in the mainstream media and political establishment took them seriously. The message of Wen's short journey for bettering the 'fragile ties' was that they could wait for some more time to resolve the border dispute. Finally what emerged as a joint communique at the end was not encouraging for the crusaders of India-China friendship because all contentious issues were left untouched. □□□ [17-12-2010]