

CHAPTER-II

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The Sino-India Border Dispute

The year 1959, marks the beginning of the Sino-Indian confrontation. An uprising in Tibet and the Sino-Indian confrontation occurred, which turned deteriorating relations into open hostility. China had made known its territorial ambition in the Himalayan region (consisting of Ladakh, Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim and parts of NEFA) and made India aware that there existed a fundamental border dispute between China and India. The uprising in Tibet in early 1959, in effect, marked the beginning of the end of Sino-Indian friendship¹ and widened the gulf between India and China. Nehru's illusions of containing China through diplomacy and appeasement had been shattered. It was realised in the Indian Parliament that the Chinese assurances of their faith in the Panchsheel, lulled India into a false sense of security.² The relations between the two countries had nose-dived and the process of deterioration started in their relations.

The Flight of the Dalai Lama:

In the wake of these developments, the Dalai Lama, alongwith some of his followers, fled to India on March 31, 1959, were his request for political asylum was granted by the Indian Government.³ Soon thousands of Tibetans fled to India and sought asylum. But it was made clear to Dalai Lama that he should not indulge in political activity in Indian territory. This act of India was perfectly in conformity with the rules of international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴ The Tibetan revolt and the Dalai Lama's dramatic escape and subsequent refugee status received widespread sympathy both in India and abroad.⁵ Indian popular support for Tibet was both spontaneous and immense. In keeping all these points in mind China openly blamed India for engineering rebellious activities in Tibet. The Chinese Premier reminded India that developments in Tibet were China's internal affairs and warned that China would not tolerate foreign intervention in its domestic affairs.⁶

The Tibetan Revolt:

India was committing an unfriendly act towards the Chinese by morally supporting the Tibetan people. The uprising in Tibet further widened the gulf between India and China. China warned that India was already having enough trouble with Pakistan and if she now persisted in her attitude towards Tibet, China would see to it that another front was opened against her in the north. This threat naturally roused the suspicion that China was going to woo Pakistan against India.⁷ The boundary dispute with China arose from the Tibetan question. If China was not allowed to over run Tibet, there would have been negligible common boundary between India and China. The Tibetan question proved to be the genesis of conflict.⁸ In the wake of Tibetan episode, India wanted to play the role of an honest peace broker but China scuttled every such effort.

Side by side with these efforts to tighten the screw on Tibet, the Chinese now began a new series of intrusions across India's traditional northern frontier. On July 30, 1959, the Government of India received information regarding the presence of a Chinese armed detachment in the region of Western Pangong Lake in Ladakh and of the establishment of a Chinese camp at Spanggur, both these places lying well within the Indian frontier. News was also received that an Indian police party of six men on reconnaissance duty within Indian frontier was arrested and taken into custody by the Chinese. The Government of India immediately lodged a strong protest to Beijing against the violation of the Indian border and the arrest of the Indian police party, "engaged in bonafide duties within Indian territory. Beijing, however, instead of answering the Indian protest, brought forward counter charges against India, alleging that Indian armed personnel had intruded into Chinese territory, and as they did not withdraw inspite of "friendly warning", there was no alternative but to disarm and detain them.⁹ This was soon followed by other and more violent intrusions.

On August 7, 1959, Nehru revealed, an armed Chinese patrol had violated the Indian border at Khinzemane in the Kameng frontier division,

pushing the Indian patrol to a bridge at Drokung Samba, although no exchange of fire had taken place. Later, the Indian picket had re-established itself at the same place and did not accede to the Chinese demand to withdraw and lower the Indian flag.¹⁰ The Government of India protested to the Government of China against their violation of the Indian boundary at Khinzemane on August 11, 1959.¹¹

Longju Incident:

In spite of warning, another strong Chinese detachment crossed into Indian territory on August 25, 1959 south of Migyitun and fired without notice on an Indian forward picket, killing one person on the spot and seriously wounding another. On the following day the Chinese detachment outflanked the Indian post at Longju, overwhelmed the small Indian force of 18 men of the Assam Rifles and compelled them to withdraw.¹² When the Government of India made a strong protest against this unprovoked firing on a static post within Indian territory on August 28, 1959. Beijing replied that ‘Longju was indisputably part of Chinese territory’, the Indian personnel who were there were guilty of violating Chinese territorial integrity, it was they who had opened fire and Chinese only acted in self-defence. The Chinese reply added: “no section of Sino-Indian boundary has been formally delimited; ... the so called McMahon Line was set forth in the past by the British imperialists unilaterally and has never been accepted by the Chinese Government; it of course can not be regarded as legal”. The Chinese note closed with a somber warning: “No violation of Chinese territory will be tolerated. All areas that have been invaded and occupied must be evacuated. Any armed provocation will certainly meet with Chinese frontier guard’s firm rebuff”.¹³

After Longju, it was no longer possible or desirable to keep back the facts about Chinese aggression from the Parliament or people of India on August 28, 1959, in reply to a series of questions and adjournment notice in the Lok Sabha, Nehru, revealed that the Chinese had been continually violating Indian territorial integrity and these incursions had occurred in places as far apart as Ladakh in the north-west and NEFA in the extreme north-east. He gave

a complete account of the Longju incident and announced that the entire NEFA border, which had hitherto been guarded by the Assam Rifles and the militia, would henceforth be placed under army control. Although the Indian and Chinese versions of the Longju incident differed, it was clear that this incident soured the relations.¹⁴

Three days later on August 31, speaking to the Rajya Sabha, Nehru gave a more concrete account of the policy which his Government would follow in dealing with Chinese incursions. It would be a “double policy”, he said. The Government would strengthen border defences and repulse further incursions and at the same time hold themselves in readiness to “settle matters by conference”.¹⁵ In other words he would not lead the country to war in order to recover the areas which had been forcibly occupied by the Chinese. For this he would employ the methods of negotiation. Any fresh incursion however would be repulsed with force.¹⁶

These incidents naturally produced an uproar in both the countries, differing accounts of what had happened, and mutual protests.¹⁷ In early September 1959, China revived the controversy over the Sino-Indian border by its refusal to accept the validity of the McMahon Line and reiterated its claims on Indian territory, specially in the NEFA and Ladakh areas of India. The impasse over the Sino-Indian border dispute rested on differing positions of both the countries. India insists on the legality, validity and legitimacy of the McMahon Line as the boundary line demarcating the Sino-Indian Border. According to the Government of India, the frontier in the eastern sector was demarcated through negotiations by the British Indian Government and this had always been honoured by the past governments in Tibet and China.¹⁸ But on the other hand China refused to ratify this treaty and also branded it illegal and as the one imposed on Tibet by Britain and declared that Tibet was not an independent nation to enter into a treaty of this sort. There were also differences of opinion between the Chinese and Indians with regard to drawing of the McMahon line, over Longju and Dholu called Chedong by the Chinese. The Chinese claimed that both these areas were north of the line, whereas the

Indian Government claimed that they were in south of it.¹⁹ Chinese logic in challenging the legality of the line was both factually incorrect and legally irrelevant.²⁰ Similarly, India had based its claim over Ladakh at the western sector on a treaty which the rulers of Tibet negotiated in 1842, after being defeated in a war by the rulers of Ladakh. While repudiating this view, the Chinese Government maintains that the Chinese central government of the time neither participated in negotiations nor ratified the results. According to the Government of India, all its territorial claims are based on geography, history, tradition and old treaties and agreements with China. On the contrary, Beijing maintains that the boundary has never been delimited.²¹

In regard to these challenges, there were exchange of notes between two governments and both the government alleged on each other. Ultimately, Chou En-Lai came out with the ideas which had been occupying his mind all these years. Moreover, this was not the first occasion that Chou En-Lai gave an inkling of his mind to Nehru. While discussing Chou En-Lai's letter in the Parliament Nehru expressed his great concern that the demand for Himalaya to be handed over as a gift to the Chinese – was really a matter of anxiety. He compared the Chinese attitude with that of those aggressive, imperialist powers of the west, which not long ago regarded themselves as leaders of the world and expected the rest to follow them. "What is happening in China today is the pride and arrogance of might that is showing in their language and in their behaviour to us and in so many other things they have done". "What we have to face today", he said in another context, "is a great and powerful nation, which is aggressive. It might be aggressive minus communism or plus communism. Either way it is there". Nehru now realised that his assessment of China, on which India's China policy was based, was wrong. In a depressing tone he confessed to the Parliament that "the Chinese had valued India's friendship only to a very low extent in the final analysis". With disarming frankness, he told his critics: "I did not know that China would behave like this".

Regarding the policy to be pursued in the face of Chinese threats and claims, he told Parliament that while the McMahon Line was India's frontier,

he would be prepared for minor adjustments here and there. "A particular place one mile this side or that side of the McMahon Line was a small matter". The broad principle was the water-shed. "I stick to that broad approach. But if a slight deviation by evidence or facts in alignment is necessary, it is not a major matter. That has to be decided by facts, not by anybody's coercion".²² To Chou En-Lai he wrote to the same effect, saying that while the Government of India could not discuss with China the future of large areas of Indian territory which China claimed, they would be prepared to discuss minor adjustments here and there. "No discussion", however, "can be fruitful unless the posts on the traditional side of the Indian frontier now held by the Chinese forces are first evacuated by them and further threats and intimidations immediately cease".²³

In the face of continuous Chinese aggressions, India had no alternative but to step up its defence preparedness; but Nehru continued to be hopeful that, once the Chinese understood the extreme caution that India had shown in the matter of giving asylum to Dalai Lama they would begin to appreciate the Indian position.²⁴ Between late September and early November 1959, as Kavic has noted, the Chinese appeared to be relenting. "After weeks of frustration, the Indian Ambassador in Beijing was received cordially by the Foreign Ministry and Chou replied with a warm telegram to Nehru's congratulations on the tenth anniversary of the Peoples Republic".²⁵ He couched in the warmest language, applauding the principles of co-existence and describing the current differences between India and China as "only an episode" in a story of "age-old friendship".²⁶

Kongka Pass Incident:

But this renewed attempt at reconciliation was cut short by another severe blow. On October, 21, 1959, New Delhi got the staggering news that an Indian police party on routine patrol duty near Kongka Pass in the Chang Chenmo Valley in Ladakh had been ambushed and fired upon the Chinese troops. All the situations regarding this strategy got clear afterwards. On October 20, two Indian policemen and a porter went out on patrol duty in

Kongka Pass in Ladakh but they did not return. Consequently a party was sent to trace them out, the search became unsuccessful. Next morning another party under the leadership of Karam Singh went out to continue research. After they had gone about five miles, they saw the hoof, prints of some horses, obviously belonging to the Chinese. Following these marks they forwarded ahead and found a Chinese soldier on hills shouting as if asking for surrender. In response, Karam Singh also loudly declared that it was their area. Immediately there was a volley of fire both from front and from the hill top. The Indian personnel fired back in self defence, but defeated by the Chinese military because of their strength and strategic position. Nine Indians were killed, one was seriously injured, and others surrendered.

After this encounter the prisoners were kept in bad conditioned tent in chilling cold. Wounded person was not given proper attention and medicine. They were kept under threat and a pressure was constantly on them that they should state that Indian army pre-empted and penetrated into Chinese land, and Indians were aggressor.

The Chinese government also complained that Indian troops “unlawfully intruded into Chinese territory” and “opened heavy fire on Chinese frontier guards and launched armed attack”. In response to that Chinese frontier guards were compelled to fire back in self-defence. In their note of October 23, the Government of India repudiated the Chinese allegations, affirmed that the area where the incident took place was within the Indian frontier and maintained that the attacked was launched by the Chinese.

The Chinese government showed resentment in their note of October 25, on Indian statement and said that they could not agree to the allegation of the Indian Government. They again reasserted that the place of incident was absolutely under Chinese territory and any violation of this should be rebuffed. They also rejected Indian claim for any compensation. The Government of India in their memorandum of November 4 proved strongly with evidences that the area under dispute belonged to India. Ultimately on November 14, 1959, the Chinese handed over the dead bodies and released the Indian prisoners.²⁷

The Kongka Pass incident brought Sino-Indian relations almost to a breaking point. Nehru admitted in a speech in Delhi, that “the border question was a big one and had possibilities of becoming bigger in the future”, and that a new chapter had been opened in the relations between the two countries when the Chinese opened fire. Following this incident the Tibetan borders of Ladakh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh were assigned to the army.²⁸ New border posts were set up, and new measures undertaken to meet any situation which the Chinese might have created in future.

Meanwhile, there was strong criticism in the world press of Chinese action in the Indian borderlands. Practically the entire non-communist press in East, South-East, West Asia and Eurasia voiced sympathy for India and condemnation of Chinese aggressiveness. Consequently in a major policy speech to the Supreme Soviet a few days later, the Soviet Premier declared that the Soviet Union would be happy “if there were no more incidents and if the existing frontier disputes were settled by way of friendly negotiations”.²⁹ Under this pressure of world, Beijing now decided to change its tactics and pursue its objectives in a new form.

Secondly, attempts were made to ‘show up’ India-to prove to the world that China was in dead earnest about settling her border dispute with India and if it could not be solved, it was entirely due to Indian intransigence.³⁰ On November 7, 1959 the Chinese government came forward with a proposal that the armed forces of each side withdraw twenty kilometres from the line of actual control along the entire Sino-Indian border and halt patrols, to which Nehru replied on November 16, that the government of India had not posted any armed personnel at or near the international boundary. He further informed Chou En-Lai that the Indian border outposts already had instructions not to send out any forward patrols and if a similar decision was taken by the Chinese government also, the risk of border clashes would be completely eliminated. The Government of India, however, refused to agree to any arrangement, even as an interim measure, which would maintain the forcible Chinese occupation of Longju.³¹ As for Ladakh, Nehru proposed that India would withdraw all her

personnel to the west of the line shown as the international boundary in Chinese maps of 1956, and China on her part should similarly withdraw all her personnel to the east of the international boundary as shown in India's official maps and described in Indian notes. "As the two lines were separated by long distances, it was clear that there would hardly be any risk of border clashes between the forces on either side." In the middle sector of the frontier touching Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, there were no Indian border areas under Chinese occupation, and there should be "no risk of border clashes if the precaution is taken not to send out border patrols".³² The Indian Government, clearly, was not prepared to apply the same principle on the eastern sector, where her boundaries were more clearly demarcated. Nehru's proposals were out-rightly rejected by Chou En-Lai in his letter of December 17, 1959, as "lacking in fairness". Chou En-Lai suggested at the same time that the two Prime Minister should meet on December 26, either in China or Burma. While the government of India thought that this was not likely to serve any useful purpose, Nehru extended an invitation to Chou En-Lai to come over to Delhi and discuss the matter with him.³³

A brochure released by the Ministry of External Affairs on January 13, 1960, unequivocally declared that the government of India "cannot accept the Chinese contention that the entire Sino-Indian frontier was undelimited. Negotiations on this basis are unacceptable to the government of India". Near about the same date Nehru told a Press Conference at New Delhi that there was no common ground between the Chinese and India points of view, and therefore he did not visualise any meeting between himself and the Chinese Prime Minister in the near future. Hardly, three weeks had passed since then when India was startled by the news that Nehru had invited Chou En-Lai to a meeting at New Delhi.³⁴ Nehru defended himself by saying that he had invited Chou En-Lai "for a meeting and not for negotiations!"

Chou En-Lai needed no persuasion to accept the invitation. In a sense it was for him a diplomatic victory. A meeting without preconditions is what he was pleading for. He got it. Intimating his acceptance of the invitation on

February 26, 1960, he wrote: “The Chinese Government takes a positive attitude towards the forthcoming meeting and has confidence in it... I particularly hope to see the dark clouds hovering between our two countries dispersed through our joint efforts so that the long-standing friendly relations between our two countries may be consolidated and developed”.³⁵

Chou’s Visit to India:

Chou En Lai accompanied by his formidable deputy Marshal Che Yi arrived at New Delhi on April 19, 1960 to discuss border problem with India. The start was very ominous in that Nehru, in his welcome speech referred to the shattering of all dreams of age old friendship due to the unilateral actions of the Chinese during the last few months. Chou was a little amiable when he stated that despite difficulties, the friendship between the two countries would survive. The talks with Nehru were held in cordial manner but Chou had nothing new to offer but to reiterate the old Chinese stance. He talked in terms of border deal by swapping NEFA for northeast Ladakh. The public opinion in the country was tense and all the political parties, including a small section of the congress party, were suspicious about the outcome of the meeting. Nehru had often to address the demonstrators pleading with them not to remain so agitated.

According to a junior officer in the Ministry of External Affairs K. Natwar Singh who was in attendance on Chou, as a gesture of taking his senior colleagues into confidence Nehru got a meeting of Chou arranged with the Home Minister G.B. Pant and Finance Minister Morarji Desai. The plain truth spoken at these meetings offended Chou very much. But Chou at times did not behave as an equal at these talks. He came out with a formula which had no substance of any ‘give and take’. His deputy was very strident in his utterances. Dr. Radhakrishna who also met him observed that Che talked like a Marshal, and not as a Foreign Minister, trying to lay down terms as a victor to the vanquished.³⁶ Chou at a press conference held on April 25, 1960, made a six point statement:

1. There exists a dispute on the boundary between the two parties.
2. There exists between the two countries a line of actual control up to which each side exercise administrative jurisdiction.
3. While determining the boundary between the two countries certain geographical principles, such as watershed, river valleys and mountain passes would be applicable equally to all sectors of the boundary.
4. A settlement of the boundary question between the two countries should take into account the national feelings of the two peoples for the Himalayas and the Karakoram mountains respectively.
5. Pending settlement of the boundary question through discussions, both sides should keep to the line of actual control and should not put forward territorial claims as preconditions, but individual adjustments may be made.
6. In order to ensure tranquillity on the border so as to facilitate the discussions, both sides should continue to refrain from patrolling along all sectors of the boundary.³⁷

Chou En-Lai's visit to India in April 1960 turned out to be a failure in the sense that there could be no common ground between the two sides on the border dispute. The most they could do was to agree to have an official body comprising equal number of each side who would examine, check and study all historical documents, records and maps relating to the boundary question. Their reports would state the points of agreement and disagreement which would be reviewed at the political level to find out whether any solution was possible.

Thereafter, the first meeting was held in Beijing on June 15, 1960; at which a four point agenda was adopted. The agenda spelt out the details which included the location and terrain of the boundary, treaties and agreements signed between the two countries from time to time, traditions and customs which were observed by both the countries and administrative jurisdiction claimed by each side. The officials took up their work seriously which was spread over forty seven meetings held in Beijing, New Delhi and Rangoon between November 17 and December 12, 1960.³⁸ As anticipated, nothing fruitful emerged out of this prolonged examination of documents and

maps. Reporting to the Parliament on December 21, 1960 Prime Minister Nehru stated that the joint report of the Chinese and Indian official teams really consisted of “two reports” with hardly anything in common between them. They did not even agree to disagree; they just disagreed.

In the meanwhile neither India nor China had been sitting idle. Despite financial difficulties India has been pushing through an elaborate programme of road construction in vital Himalayan areas. Defensive measures of other kinds have also been undertaken along the frontier. China too has been busy constructing new motorable roads and air-fields, creating new military outposts along the frontier, and according to some unconfirmed reports, setting up rocket bases on the Tibetan plateau. There was mounting evidence of intense reconnaissance activity, of trespasses into Indian territory by Chinese personnel, of violations of Indian air space by Chinese air-craft, and of growing infiltration in the Indian borders.³⁹ India had also complained against obstacles put in the way of Indian pilgrims, traders and trade agency in western Tibet.⁴⁰ China countered by asserting that Indian planes were violating Chinese air space and objected to the expulsion of the representative of Hsinhva News Agency.⁴¹ Speaking to the Rajya Sabha on August 19, 1960, Nehru told the House that China had for months been carrying on a violent anti-Indian propaganda, that reports of Chinese military build up in Tibet were true, and that the Indian Communists were engaged in an “unpatriotic” and “most anti-national” campaign in the border regions.⁴²

While China was striving for winning friends and influencing people all over the world, in Asia, in Africa and in Latin America, her armies were engaged in carrying on increased intrusion into Indian territory. India also tried to gear up its preparations for defending its territory. Border incidents and violations of Indian air space had continued throughout 1960 and 1961.⁴³ Within the next two years, the on going border talks reached a deadlock, with neither side showing much willingness to compromise.⁴⁴ From the beginning of 1961, the Chinese had started patrolling right up to the new boundary line, which they claimed during the officials meeting. In March 1961, a wind of

change had come over the army headquarters. India showed much alertness regarding the frontier situation and was also responsive to the strong feelings in the country against making any more concessions to the Chinese.⁴⁵ In April 1961 Chinese personnel intruded into Sikkim near Jalapla Pass. In May there was an intrusion into Indian territory near Chushul in the western sector. The Chinese troops subsequently occupied Dehra Compass, and established a base on the Chip Chap River 17 miles southeast of Daulat Beg Oldi. In the middle of 1961 one could say that the Chinese and Indian forces confronting each other in the bleak Himalayan regions were more or less equal in strength. In July 1961 a Chinese patrol crossed the Eastern Sector in the Kameng Division of north-east frontier agency. In August the Chinese forces in Ladakh established 3 new check-posts in Nyagzu and near Dambuguru. They also constructed roads linking these posts with rear bases.⁴⁶

In the last week of October the Chinese army units stationed on the opposite side of NEFA border were reported to have several incursions into the area. Repulsed from a place only a few miles away from Khinzemane, they made fresh incursions into the Dirang and Subansiri divisions.⁴⁷ Establishments of military outposts on Ladakh territory also continued.

Following the Chinese occupation of Longju, the Government of India had started taking same steps to strengthen her defences both in NEFA and in Ladakh. With a view to checking Chinese lines of advance India now decided to interpose their own posts and patrol activities in between Chinese posts and threaten Chinese lines of communications and supply. The development of communications was speeded up and the number of check-posts was doubled, and some new 'armed posts' were set up. Indian armies were either equal to it or would soon be in that position. A three year plan costing Rs. 120 crores to build a network of communications in the border areas was drawn up. For the first time in the 1961-62 winter the Indian troops stayed in their barracks which were equipped with amenities to meet the challenges of the weather and maintained links with their supply posts. Consistent with this growing confidence, the Prime Minister told the Lok Sabha on November 28, 1961, that

the situation had changed “progressively” in India’s favour “though not as much as we want it but it is a fact that, in areas which they occupied, progressively, the situation has been changing from the military point of view and other points of view in our favour”. “We shall continue to take steps to build up these things”. Nehru further assured the House, “so that ultimately we may be in position to take action to recover such territory as is in their possession.”⁴⁸

On the basis of China’s bellicose attitude and continuation of Chinese incursions in every sector, Nehru ordered in November 1961 that military patrols should proceed as far forward as possible towards the international borders to prevent Chinese advances or incursions in the western sector while Indian forces should establish “effective occupation” in the middle and eastern sectors.⁴⁹ He instructed for the establishment of rear and intermediate bases. While Nehru had ordered the patrolling of borders to prevent further Chinese incursions he left the doors open for talks.⁵⁰

Forward Policy:

Thereafter, the Indian political leadership instructed the Indian army to carry out the ill-fated “forward policy”, with a view to stemming the advancing Chinese frontier line. This policy involved sending lightly armed “penny packets” of troops into Chinese claimed border areas.⁵¹ The forward policy was designed to evict China from territory India claimed by ‘dominating’ Chinese positions and thus forcing their withdrawal.⁵² India’s forward policy was defensive and designed to contain China’s territorial expansionism in India’s areas.⁵³ This “forward policy”, however did not silence the opposition. The moment any Chinese incursion took place, the Government came for a massive attack in Parliament and there was a renewed demand that prompt measures must be taken to throw out the Chinese.

In the meanwhile, China had proposed on December 3, 1961 negotiations on a new agreement on trade and intercourse. The Government of India showed a little enthusiasm for the proposal in view of a virtual deadlock

in the Sino-Tibetan trade and China's aggressive activities on the Indian borders. Nehru informed the House about the Chinese proposal on December 5, and stated that the Government would consider the matter. In a debate on international affairs on December 7, 1961, opposition members however, warned against any negotiations with China in view of its intransigence and continuing aggression on the Indian territory. Congress members, however, generally felt that the opposition's harping on Government's weakness was doing even more harm to the nation and its morale.⁵⁴

The pace of Chinese intrusions into the Indian territory continued unabated. The Sino-Indian boundary question took a grave turn during 1962. In January 1962 some Chinese civil and military personnel crossed the border in the eastern sector near Longju. In April and May there was aggressive advance patrolling by the Chinese forces from their strongholds in the Chip Chap area of Ladakh, resulting in the establishment of a new post in Indian territory about ten miles southeast of Spanggur. In reaction to these events, Indian troops were asked to open fire if the Chinese tried to dislodge them from any position on Indian soil. More troops were dispatched to Ladakh and new posts were established, including one at the Spanggur Lake and two on the north and south shores of Pangong Lake.

This was the time when both India and China were faced with great difficulties on domestic and foreign policy fronts. Economic condition of China was not favourable both in agricultural and industrial sectors, and there was trouble in south China. Early in May 1962 the Chinese government warned the Government of India that if it continued to refused to withdraw its aggressive posts and persisted in carrying out provocations against the Chinese posts the Chinese frontier guards will be compelled to defend themselves. China further announced that she was resuming patrols in the area between Karakoram pass and Kongka pass in Ladakh because of India's provocative actions and would resume patrols on the entire Sino-Indian frontier, if India continued to "invade and occupy China's territory."⁵⁵

On the other side, Nehru made a proposal to China on May 14, 1962 that both sides withdraw to the west and east of the lines shown in their respective maps in Ladakh region of western sector. Nehru also offered to permit the Chinese to use the Aksai Chin road for civilian purposes, pending negotiation and settlement of the boundary. China rejected both the proposals and continued its pressure on the border. In the meantime, the Sino-Indian agreement of 1954 lapsed on June 3, 1962, as India maintained that no negotiations could be carried out unless China withdraw its forces from the Indian territory and restored the status quo as it existed in 1954.⁵⁶

However, by the end of July 1962, India had managed to established posts in forward areas in Ladakh that covered about 3,500 square miles of territory which China occupied earlier.⁵⁷ Erection of check posts in strategic areas along the McMahon Line by India, especially in Dhola in the Thangle area incurred China's displeasure. The Dhola post was located in an area where China had already raised objections about the exact demarcation of the McMahon Line.

China was watching India's move of constructing check posts and accused India of provoking and aggravating tension along the Sino-Indian frontier. China also warned India to withdraw its "aggressive" posts and stop the provocations otherwise it would be compelled to act in self-defence. Without waiting for India's response, China decided to forcibly push its own probes as a bulwark against India's forward policy.⁵⁸ From the above discussion it can be concluded that the matters were drifting the other way leaving no scope for negotiations. It appears that both India and China were engaged in a stupendous effort to strengthen their respective positions. Both seemed to be working on the assumption that the other would not challenge military positions directly.⁵⁹

Nehru considered war to be bad for India, China and the world, as he remarked: "continuing hostility between India and China will affect China and affect Asia and will have other far-reaching effects for generations".⁶⁰ At the same time, he added, "we will not hesitate to meet any threat to our territorial

integrity with firmness and, where necessary, by force". This indicated a definite hardening in the Government's attitude.

On the other side China reported on August 4, that the present tension had been caused by India's steady encroachment and establishment of "military strong points", on the Chinese territory. It maintained that China had never crossed its national frontier, and it could give no consideration to India's proposal for "one sided" withdrawal.⁶¹ On August 14 there was a fresh clash in the Pangong Lake area between the Chinese intruders and Indian troops. The Indian troops were also alleged to have been engaged in outrageous provocations in the Lake Pangong area and to have made fresh intrusions along the middle and eastern sectors of the boundary. On the middle sector they were supposed to have intruded once again in the area of Wiye and set up a military strong point there. On the eastern sector they were charged with repeatedly crossing the "... so called" McMahon Line and making intrusions northwards. The Chinese at the same time suggested that they would like to have discussions "as soon as possible",⁶² in their note.

India replied to this note on August 22, still maintaining that no useful discussions could be held unless the status quo preceding Chinese occupation of the Ladakh area was restored, but at the same time expressing her willingness to "receive" a representative of the Government of China to discuss these essential preliminary measures.⁶³ Before India had received a reply to its note, the Chinese had seized the Dhola post and Thagla ridge in the Kameng Frontier Division on September 8.⁶⁴ China's reply to the Indian note of August 22 was received on September 13, 1962, and proposed that discussions on the "Sino-Indian boundary question" be started on October 15 in Beijing and be held alternately in Beijing and New Delhi thereafter.⁶⁵

Throughout August and September 1962 both Indian and Chinese continued to build up their military outposts in Ladakh, the Chinese government charged the Indians for having set up 22 new Indian military strong points since the spring and the Indians alleged that the Chinese had set up 34 new posts there since May 1962.⁶⁶ In their notes of September 20-21 the

Government of China not only threatened that “flames of war may break out” in the eastern sector but mentioned that they had already ordered their troops to undertake the same type of “measures ... as in the western sector” in the “eastern and middle sectors”, and admitted having set up “additional posts” and taken up patrolling in the western sector.⁶⁷ Marshal Che Yi, in referring to Lord Home’s speech in the UN accusing China of “invasions” of India, did not hesitate in calling “Indian reactionaries and the British imperialists” as “jackals of the same lair”.

On September 20, 1962, the Chinese forces, which had hitherto made only isolated intrusions crossed the established boundary of the North East Frontier Agency in the Thagla region and started firing on a post, situated two miles east of Dhola. The firing went on five days and nights. From the morning of September 26 until the afternoon of September 27 there was exchange of fire in the vicinity of a patrol post near Dhola. “In consequence of the increasing waton nature of the Indian attacks”, reported the Peking Review, September 28, “fighting is now in progress in this area”. An intensified attack on September 29 was followed by an uneasy lull in fighting. Along with military intrusions China intensified her propaganda offensive. She accused Indian armies of capturing places north of the Thagla ridge which simply did not exist, and threatened “retaliatory” measures in other parts of the NEFA sector.

By the end of September the entire north-eastern frontier of India had become a live frontier. China was not only concentrating her troops in this region but constructing airfields also.⁶⁸ The situation in Dhola Thagla area was deteriorating and until the beginning of October 1962 India still continued to believe that China would not invade India.⁶⁹

Nehru returned from his overseas trip on October 2. On October 3, China rejected India’s idea of setting preconditions before the talks on the boundary question. On October 4, in Cabinet meeting the Government of India decided, rather belatedly, to use armed forces to deal with China.⁷⁰ October 5, Indian Defense Minister Krishna Menon announced the creation of new border command in the North –East Frontier Agency.⁷¹ On October 6, India made it

clear to China that she would insist on the Chinese armies withdrawing both from Ladakh and NEFA before she could agree to send her representative to Beijing.

The Chinese reply to this was in the form of action and not in words. On October 10, they made a massive attack on an Indian army post north of the Namka Chu river. This was the heaviest Chinese attack so far in the eastern sector. The Chinese and Indian armies now took strong positions on the two banks of the Namka Chu River.⁷² On October 12, 1962, Prime Minister Nehru told the press at New Delhi's Palam Airport before he left for Srilanka that he had already "ordered the armed forces to clear the Chinese from the NEFA". That declaration of Nehru's was seen as India's ultimatum to China.⁷³ Confirming this, on October 14, Indian Defence Minister V.K. Krishna Menon told a meeting of Congress workers at Bangalore that the Government had come to a final decision to "drive out the Chinese". He declared that the Indian Army was determined to fight the Chinese to the last man.⁷⁴

At that moment Nehru's announcement seemed to be more politically motivated rather than based on strategic calculations. It could have been designed to silence domestic criticism of Nehru's China policy but it could also offend the Chinese. The operational feasibility of Nehru's statement was very doubtful because India at that juncture was ill prepared to face an armed confrontation with China. India's decision of forcible eviction of the Chinese troops in the Dhola-Thangla area proved to be a prelude to an open war between the two countries.⁷⁵

On October 18, 1962, Mao Tse-Tung said at an enlarged meeting of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo; for many years, "we have taken a number of measures to seek a peaceful resolution of the boundary issue but India rejected all of them. They intentionally provoked even more violent armed clashes. They are bullying others too much. Now that Nehru is determined to fight with us, we have no way out but to keep him company. However, our counter attack is only meant to serve a warning to Nehru and the

Government of India that the boundary question cannot be resolved by military means".⁷⁶

Invasions:

On October 20, 1962 China launched a major invasion against India in all the three sectors of the Sino-Indian border, with the main thrust in the NEFA and Ladakh areas. This changed the entire perspective of Sino-Indian relations. The Chinese invasion was so sudden, calculated and supported by logistics that India's advance posts were suddenly overwhelmed, as were many of the defensive positions a few miles back. As compared to India, China's rapid advance was supported by a well established line of supplies and communications. The Indian troops were out-numbered and out weaponed.⁷⁷ India was taken by surprise, and was not at all prepared for such a large scale of war. But on the other hand China was fully prepared and had chosen its own moment to strike. It was China that first launched the offensive with infantry and artillery. India's retaliation to the Chinese offensive was weak, uncoordinated and poorly planned.⁷⁸ Thus a grave situation had arisen on India's northern frontiers from NEFA to Ladakh on account of "continuing and unabashed aggression by Chinese forces". Explaining the Indian reverses Krishna Menon said, "the Chinese have very considerable superiority in numbers and fire power".⁷⁹ Indian and Chinese versions differ regarding the issue of who precipitated the war.

On October 22, Nehru, in a broadcast to the nation spoke about the grave situation on the Indian frontier created by China, a "powerful and unscrupulous opponent" who cared for neither peace nor peaceful methods. Stating that this was the greatest menace faced by India since its independence, he appealed to all parties and groups, "to unite in this great enterprise and put aside the controversies and arguments, and present a solid united front before all those who seek to endanger our freedom and integrity",⁸⁰ and declared that India will "carry on the struggle because we cannot submit to the aggression or domination of others".

China did not cease invading on India. On October 22, at 3:00 a.m., the Chinese launched a vigorous attack on the Indian post at Kibitoo, at the other end of the NEFA on the tri-junction of India, Burma and Tibet, and also started concentrating at Longju, in the Subansiri District, in the central part of NEFA. Fighting was now taking place on five sectors, in the Chip Chap valley and the Pangong Lake regions of Ladakh in the tri-junction of India, Bhutan and Tibet on the western extreme of NEFA, in the tri-junction of India, Burma and Tibet on its eastern extreme and a Longju in the middle. The Chinese captured Tsang Dhar, a brigade headquarters and four of the five Indian out-post in the region, on October 23. By October 24, the Chinese had crossed the McMahon Line along a twenty-five mile front to a depth of eight miles on the Khinzemane sector and were in control of the entire section from the Bhutan border to Bumla.⁸¹

During the course of war both the sides suffered a lot. For Chinese also it was very hard nut to crack to inflict heavy Indian troops. On the other hand Indian army also played with the tooth and nail while facing the Chinese onslaught. In the meantime Chou En-Lai proposed a three-point ceasefire formula on October 24, 1962. In a three-point proposal for the settlement of the boundary question China reiterated its earlier stand of traditional customary boundary line and the illegality of McMahon Line, and accused India of occupying 90,000 sq kms of Chinese territory in Eastern Sector (South of McMahon Line) and rejecting all Chinese initiatives for peaceful resolution of the border crises. The statement also accused India of starting a massive general offensive on October 20 in both eastern and western sectors and stated that Chinese frontier guards were forced to strike back in self defence under such serious circumstances. The three proposals it advanced included:⁸²

1. Both parties to affirm that the Sino-Indian boundary question must be settled peaceful through negotiations, and that, pending a peaceful settlement both parties would respect the line of actual control between

the two sides along the entire Sino-Indian border and the armed forces of each side would withdraw twenty kilometres from this line and disengage.

2. Provided the Indian Government agreed to this proposal, China would withdraw its frontier guards in the Eastern Sector to the north of the line of actual control, while both China and India would simultaneously undertake not to cross the line of actual control in the Middle and Western sectors.
3. In order to seek a friendly settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question, talks should be held once again by the Prime Ministers of China and India.⁸³

As the Line of Actual Control had been pushed deep into Indian territory for four days of steady Chinese advance, the terms were not acceptable to India. Nehru in this context observed that after advancing forty to sixty kilometres by blatant military aggression to offer to withdraw twenty kilometres provided both sides did that was a deceptive device which could fool no body.⁸⁴ Rejecting the proposals Nehru replied on October 27 that India would welcome any Chinese representative to discuss further measures to facilitate a peaceful settlement, provided China reverted to the position as it prevailed all along the boundary prior to September 8, 1962.⁸⁵

Chou in his reply on November 4 said that by the line of actual control he meant the line which existed on November 7, 1959. It merely meant that he had accepted McMahon line in the eastern sector which China had already recognized, in its agreement with Burma. But the crux of the problem was of the western sector in which China wanted to maintain the status quo that is it wanted to keep in its control what it had occupied during the war. China continued to maintain that its forces in October 1962 had only reached the line of November 7, 1959.

Nehru, in his reply on November 14 said that the November 7, 1959 line included not only all the Chinese posts established in the three years since 1959 but also included all the Indian posts in the territory till October 20, 1962 which had already been wiped out. China, for its, part took an additional 5000 to 6000 square miles since their November 7, 1959 position. In the middle sector China had no authority south of the main Himalayan watershed ridge. In

the eastern sector, the Chinese withdrawal would leave them in control of the various passes leading into India. It meant Indian forces would remain twenty kilometres to the south of the actual line of occupation leaving the entire Indian frontier defences at the mercy of any fresh invasion.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, the uneasy lull on the Sino-Indian border was again broken on November 15, 1962 when China launched a massive attack on the eastern front. During second phase of the offensive in eastern sector, the Chinese apart from meeting tough resistance by the Indian forces at the battle of Nuranang, overran Indian positions at Sela, Dirang, Bomdila and Walong etc. places without much fight.⁸⁷

Unilateral Ceasefire:

On November 21, when China's advance was at its peak, it declared an unilateral ceasefire along the entire border, and announced that its troops would, from December 1, 1962 withdraw to positions twenty kilometres behind the line of actual control as existing on November 7, 1959. The statement, however, warned that China reserved the right to fight back in self defence in three circumstances:

1. if the Indians should continue their attack after the Chinese frontier guards have ceased fire and when they are withdrawing;
2. if after Chinese withdrawal, Indians advanced to the line of actual control in the eastern sector and/or refused to withdrawn but remained on the line of actual control in the middle and western sectors, and
3. if, after withdrawal, the Indian troops should cross the line of actual control and recover their positions prior to September 8, 1962.⁸⁸

The statement further expressed the hope that India would make a positive response which will open the way for further negotiations. Further, the Chinese government suggested to Indian government that the officials of the two sides should meet to discuss the twenty kilometres withdrawal of their armed forces to form a demilitarised zone, the establishment of civilian check posts and the return of captured personnel.⁸⁹ In the history of the modern world,

China may be the only country to declare a unilateral cease-fire, especially after such a rapid and substantial advance into foreign territory.⁹⁰

The unilateral declaration of a ceasefire was a military victory for China not because they were more powerful but because we were ill-prepared. The new Defence Minister Y.B. Chavan had to admit; the training of Indian troops was not meant for mountain oriented war; they did not have the heart for a war that China was likely to launch; had no requisite knowledge of the Chinese tactics and ways of war, their weapon, equipments and capabilities.⁹¹ There were other factors also responsible for India's defeat at the hands of the Chinese; the organisation and establishment, equipment and logistics for mountain warfare compared unfavourably with those of the Chinese; our military intelligence was extraordinarily inadequate, basic equipment units were deficient, most of the wireless sets and signal equipments were old and too heavy for operation in mountainous region and winter clothing was seldom available.⁹²

Nehru submitted that the Chinese proposals of November 21, 1962 were merely a repetition of their earlier proposals, with the addition of the unilateral declaration of ceasefire and withdrawal.⁹³ There was ample controversy over the Line of Actual Control, which was September 8, 1962 position to India and November 7, 1959 position to China⁹⁴. Till November 25, the Government of India did not accept the Chinese ceasefire proposal, as the acceptance of such a proposal would amount to acceptance of Chinese control over large Chunks of Indian territory in Ladakh and key positions in NEFA.⁹⁵ The Government of India, he declared, could neither compromise with this further Chinese aggression, nor permit the aggressor to retain the position he had acquired by force by further aggression since September 8, 1962, "as this would mean not only letting him have what he wanted but exposing our country to further inroads and demands in the future". Statesman like Ram Sevak Yadav, Frank Anthony and some others viewed the Chinese proposal as another trick to gain time to make another base for attack.⁹⁶ A deadlock started from both the sides.

The Colombo Proposals:

Meanwhile, efforts were made by some Afro-Asian countries to help to resolve the tension on the borders and evolve a formula to bring India and China to the negotiating table. Consequently a conference of the six non-aligned nations comprising Burma, Cambodia, Shri Lanka, Egypt, Ghana and Indonesia was held in Colombo on December 10, 1962.⁹⁷ The six non-aligned nations intended to negotiate only because they presupposed that the dispute constituted a threat to the “concept of Afro-Asian Unity”, and also, “for the countries with policies of neutrality and non-alignment”. It was considered to be very significant in international quarters. The six powers held their meeting at Colombo to consider the Chinese proposal of cease-fire.⁹⁸ The ceasefire formula, evolved by the conference and later known as the Colombo Proposals, attempted to provide an equitable and fair basis for further negotiations between the two nations, and to restore peace in the sub-continent.⁹⁹

In the eastern sector, the line of actual control, that is the McMahon Line would serve as the cease-fire limit except in Thagla and Longju areas which were in Chinese occupation. In the middle sector where there was not much controversy the two countries would negotiate for a peaceful settlement. The problem was of the western sector for which it was suggested that China would carry out the 20 km withdrawal which it had proposed in the cease-fire announcement, but there would be no reciprocation from the Indian side, the Indian troops would stay where they were as they had already been pushed back much in the Indian territory. The area vacated by the Chinese could be a demilitarized zone to be administered by civilian posts of the two countries to be agreed upon. India accepted these proposals which would virtually restore its position in the east and require China to pull back from about 2700 sq. miles in the western sector. As regards the military posts, they were to be replaced on parity basis so that neither side could claim priority over the other.¹⁰⁰

Chinese rejected the proposal as they wanted withdrawal of both sides and not of Chinese troops alone by twenty kilometres along the whole border and not only in the western sector. Meanwhile, Chou En-Lai informed

Mrs. Bandaranaike that Chinese accepted the proposal in principle but he insisted that Indians should not be allowed to go back into the strip in which they had infiltrated under the forward policy, either with troops or civilian personnel.¹⁰¹ In effect, it meant a rejection of the substantive part of the Colombo Proposals. India, on the other hand, in the light of the clarifications, accepted the proposals totally and unreservedly, thus placing the ball firmly in China's Court.¹⁰²

In January 1963, it was clarified by the Ceylonese Prime Minister, Mrs. Bandaranaike that the Government of India was prepared to accept the proposals subject to the parliamentary approval. On January 25, 1963, Nehru placed the full text of proposals before the Lok Sabha along with certain clarifications of the neutral power's intentions received from the Ceylonese Prime Minister. Infact, the Colombo Proposals, "were used to lure and lull India into the belief that it was possible toward off the Chinese menace through negotiations with Beijing." In the spring of 1963, Beijing out-rightly refused to accept the Colombo Proposals, whereas India had accepted them without any reservations.¹⁰³ The Government of China also rejected the reference of the border dispute with India to the International Court of Justice. They were not in favour of arbitration and finally had rejected the Colombo Proposals.¹⁰⁴ Nehru insisted that there would be no talks, until the Chinese Government accepted them in toto. The acceptance of the Proposals was in favour of India's security interest.¹⁰⁵

In 1964 Chou En-Lai was reported to be ready for opening up direct negotiations with India on the basis of the Colombo Proposals. He declared, "Relaxation of the Sino-Indian boundary question is entirely possible provided India agrees to return to the conference table without preconditions". The proposals of the Colombo negotiations were reduced to four alternatives:

1. Address private state communication to the two contending powers, India and China, appealing to them to come to a settlement;

2. Postpone the conference to an alternative venue with expanded membership;
3. Pass resolution in general terms propounding the philosophy of non-alignment and peace; and
4. To adopt a resolution incorporating the stand points of Ghana and the UAR”.¹⁰⁶

The Colombo Proposals died a lingering death as neither India nor China had accepted them for reasons of their own. The border conflict dealt heavy blow to the sentiment of friendship between the two countries. As a result, the diplomatic impasse continued for a long period. Nehru stated in the AICC meeting on May 17, 1964 that India had taken the lead in accepting the Colombo Proposals as well as the suggestion of considering the vacation of the post as a basis for starting negotiations, and it was now upto China to take further initiative for direct talk with India.¹⁰⁷ The bilateral relations remained unchanged in the Post-Nehru period.

The first important Parliamentary discussion on External Affairs after Nehru’s demise took place on September 25, 1964. The new External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh initiated the discussion and regretted that China continued to take a “negative and intransigent attitude towards the Colombo Proposals”. He categorically stated that India was willing to enter into negotiations with China in the “manner envisaged in the Colombo Proposals”, should the latter withdraw its seven posts in the demilitarized zone in Ladakh. He further stated that “we have thus gone to the farthest limit possible within the ambit of the Colombo Proposals in order to enable negotiations to take place between the two countries”. The minister however declared: “we shall not go to the Conference Table on Chinese terms and we shall not give up our rights in territory which was illegally and by force occupied by China. It is for China to give evidence of her sincerity to reach a settlement which she has singularly failed to do so far.”¹⁰⁹

Throughout the year 1964 both countries alleged border intrusions into each other’s territories and lodged protests. China continued to negatively portray India’s image. On October 16, 1964 China exploded atom-bomb and

conducted its first nuclear test.¹¹⁰ With China going nuclear, India's threat perception increased manifold. The Members of Parliament warned that the entire context of India's defence strategy and foreign diplomacy had changed with China emerging as a nuclear power. They further stated that the Chinese explosion could not be ignored, it could be written off; it could not be played down; it was of major significance. India was the country for which it had the most immediate importance.¹¹¹ Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri realized the gravity of the issue and stated in the Parliament that India could not simultaneously raise its voice against nuclear warfare and weapons and also go in for atom bomb which would add heavily on state exchequer. He was of the opinion that India's policy towards nuclear weapons was advantageous to the nation, and the government would keep the threat in mind, but it would not take any decision in a hurry that only with an atom bomb it could defend itself against China.¹¹² In December, 1964, Prime Minister Shastri stated that in view of continued intransigence any question of negotiations with China did not arise, the India government would continue to believe "in the pursuit of peace and in settlement by mutual discussions provided always that such discussions can be held consistently with the honour and dignity of the country". Replying to the non-communist oppositions demand for a categorical assurance that not an inch of land would be surrendered to China, Shastri said: "we are not going to give up our Indian territory. But it is true that the Colombo Proposals are there and we have to keep them in mind".¹¹³

Soon after on December 30, 1964 Premier Chou En-Lai pointed out that India had made a totally unreasonable demand on China to evacuate the civilian posts in Ladakh, he further stated that China had not given up its sovereignty over the 90,000 sq kms of territory south of McMahon Line. To this Chinese statement, the official Indian response was that "what Chou En-Lai has done is to bolt and bar the door completely."¹¹⁴

The year 1965 witnessed one of the lowest ebbs in Sino-Indian bilateral relations due to Pakistan factor. During September, October and November many border incursions and clashes took place on the Sino-Indian border.

On September 19, the Chinese troops ambushed and killed three civilian personnel of an Indian patrol in Tsaskur in the Ladakh sector. Later, on September 20 and 21, troops also intruded into Sikkim border at Nathula and Dong Chula. On November 13, Chinese troops opened fire on two Indian outposts across Dong Chula on the Sikkim border and killed one Indian soldier.¹¹⁵ Both nations exchanged diplomatic notes and lodged strong protests.

The Indian Defence Minister, YB Chavan conceded that since September 15, China had intruded across the border, or the line of actual control on 33 occasions.¹¹⁶ Throughout the year the Chinese government maintained, in an intensified form, its hostility towards India. Developments during the year revealed, even more clearly than before, that the Sino-Indian border question was not merely a territorial issue but an instrument forged by China to bring about a political confrontation between the two countries and to apply protracted military pressure on India.¹¹⁷

Although no major armed clash took place on the border in 1966, Chinese aggressive activity kept the tension simmering on the border. China not only reiterated its territorial claims on the western and eastern sectors of the border, but also carried out a series of minor intrusions across the border. In January, 1966 China lodged protest with the Indian government against its alleged interference in China's internal affairs by using the question of Tibet. China expressed concern over Dalai Lama's anti-Chinese activities in India.¹¹⁸

On February 16, the Prime Minister told the Lok Sabha that during December 1965 to January 1966, the Chinese committed as many as 27 violations – 19 in Ladakh, 4 in NEFA., 1 in UP and 3 in Sikkim.¹¹⁹ When Mrs. Indira Gandhi assumed the post of Prime Minister after the sudden death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Premier Chou En-Lai sent message to Madam Gandhi greeting her on the assumption of the post of premier.¹²⁰

From mid 1966 onward, the internal condition of both India and China was in a state of continuous flux. China was in the midst of socio-economic upheaval and acute leadership struggle during the Cultural Revolution phase

(1966-69). In India, the new Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi was an untried and untested leader.¹²¹ Sino-Indian relations further deteriorated in June 1967 with the expulsion of two Indian diplomats from Beijing on alleged charges of “espionage activities.”¹²² The Indian External Affairs Minister stated that the list of charges of alleged spying was a “tissue of lies”. On June 14, the minister referred to the humiliating treatment accorded to the Indian diplomats by the Red Guards who had been physically assaulted. He further stated that the Chinese Government had violated the “ordinary rules of diplomatic usages” and had also broken its own “pledge of conducting the diplomatic safely across to border.”¹²³ Later in a daring and surprise action, China put the entire staff of the Indian Embassy and their families in Beijing under siege in the embassy’s compound. India immediately lodged a strong protest and warned China that should be siege of the Indian Embassy not to lifted “within 4 hours”, India would take appropriate counter measures. On June 19, India did the same to Chinese embassy staff at New Delhi and immediately the next day China lifted the siege of the Indian Embassy in Beijing. India responded on June 21 by lifting restrictions on the movement of the Chinese staff and sent back two Chinese diplomats from India.¹²⁴

The winter of 1967 witnessed skirmishes on Sino-Indian border. On September 11, Chinese troops attacked Indian troops on the Sikkim border across the Nathula and opened heavy mortar and artillery fire. After repeated Indian protests and proposal for ceasefire, by September 15 there was a virtual cessation of all hostile activity. The Chinese again fired heavily on the Indian positions at Chola, on October 1 and both sides suffered casualties. On October 10, Chola again witnessed exchange of heavy fires between Indian and Chinese troops. The Indian Defence Minister informed the Parliament that Indian losses in the two border incidents were 88 killed and 163 wounded, while the Chinese casualties were estimated to be 300 killed and 450 wounded in Nathula firing and 40 in Chola. The minister assured that the government was keeping a close watch on developments across the borders having a bearing on India’s security, and those were accordingly taken note of in the defence plans.¹²⁵

The presidential address on February 12, 1968 underscored India's desire to seek normalization of relations with China. "We have always wished the Chinese people well – The principles of mutual respect, non aggression and non-interference along provide a durable basis for international relations. On our part, we seek restoration of our relation with China on these principles".¹²⁶

Despite Chinese intransigence, India was moving towards creating a favourable climate for ending the stalemate in Sino-Indian relations. Premier Gandhi stated at Press Conference on January 1, 1969, that the Government of India was prepared to "try and find" a way of solving the dispute with China without insisting on its acceptance of the Colombo proposals as a precondition.¹²⁷ The President, Zakir Husain, stated further in his address to the Parliament on February 17 that it was our firm belief that the disturbed image of our country which China projected through its ideological prisms will succumb to the realities of the situation. Governments have expressed more than once with frankness and sincerity their desire to have friendship of relations with China consistent with our sovereignty, territorial integrity and on the basis of absolute non-interference in each others internal affairs.¹²⁸

On April 8, 1969, External Affair Minister Dinesh Singh outlined the Government's China policy in the Lok Sabha that, our policy is based on friendship and cooperation. We do not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of others – the policies of China will have to change one day – we have a long frontier with China. We would like to reduce tension along this frontier.¹²⁹

Chinese foreign policy during the ensuring period was marked by a more relaxed profile. In 1969 China witnessed the end of infamous Cultural Revolution. Moderation was the keyword in Chinese internal and external policies. Following the ninth National Party Congress in April, China stated that regarding boundary question "Government have consistently stood for negotiations through diplomatic channels to reach a fair and reasonable settlement. Pending a settlement, the status quo of the boundary should be maintained and conflict avoided."¹³⁰ As a result, Chinese diplomats started attending some receptions in other capitals given in honour of visiting Indian

dignitaries. The atmosphere further improved, by the end of the year when, both the Indian and Chinese diplomats exchanged greetings and attended receptions hosted by their respective missions. These developments led to a fertile ground for the diplomatic exchange from both the sides (India and China).

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