

# CHAPTER-III

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### The Process of Normalisation

The haze from the ashes of war of 1962 was still smouldering but the wind of understanding from both the sides also started blowing since 1970 onwards. The ruptured diplomatic relations were patched up and verbal dialogues started between India and China. At the beginning of the 1970s we have the famous smile on Mao Tse-Tung when he greeted our Charge'd' Affairs Brijesh Mishra during the May Day celebrations in 1970 in Beijing<sup>1</sup> with the remark: "India and China have been friend and they should have the same old friendship". He expressed hope that two countries would re-establish ties. When the matter was pursued with the Chinese foreign office, their response was cold in stating that it was for the government of India to respond to the gesture with concrete proposals. They, on their part, were not prepared to send a written communication to place on record what Mao had said.<sup>2</sup> Mao Tse-Tung's overture was judged to be extremely important by the Indian side and conversations were opened in three to four capitals between the two governments.<sup>3</sup> However, the problem was that the Indian Government could not actually act upon a mere gesture as there was nothing in writing to indicate that Chinese intentions and expressions were in consonance with their gesture. Nevertheless the Indian Government treated the incident seriously and took note of diplomat's reports on the matter.<sup>4</sup> Very slow progress was being maintained.

In 1970 Defence Minister Swaran Singh, referring to India's relations with China while initiating the discussion on a resolution on Foreign Policy at the AICC (I) meeting in New Delhi said that at present there was not much hope and there was no concrete evidence which is likely to be any response from China to India's offers of resolving difficulties by peaceful means through negotiations.<sup>5</sup>

Indian diplomats held exploratory talks with their Chinese counterparts in Cairo.<sup>6</sup> This was a very significant move towards normalisation. Though it

did not show any immediate positive results but had all the traits which were going to be beneficial in the long term. China also extended cooperation involving the investigation into two Indian army officers who were missing while climbing the Chomolhari peak in Bhutan. In keeping with this Chinese spirit, India gradually minimized the strength of the police contingent posted at the Chinese Embassy gates in New Delhi. Otherwise the officially controlled Chinese media did not indulge in any direct criticism against the Indian Government.<sup>7</sup>

In the same year another similar event took place in Moscow when the Indian Ambassador D.P. Dhar met the Chinese envoy twice and talked about the possibility of a thaw in relationship of the two countries.<sup>8</sup> All these friendly gestures increased diplomatic interaction between the two sides. An organisation in conjunction with the Chinese Government invited an Indian diplomat for a quasi-official dinner. Its importance stems from the fact that these parties were described as “friendly” and “Indian inclusion in the list is regarded as a peace feeler”.

Moreover, several Indian diplomatic personnel attended a Chinese Embassy reception in August 1970 to commemorate the 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the PLA (Peoples Liberation Army). This was a sharp contrast to the earlier Indian response on the matter. Then only a junior official from the External Affairs Ministry attended such receptions to maintain minimal diplomatic courtesies. It, therefore, indicated that bilateral relations had coursed through a positive phase and entered into the cordial one. Otherwise friendly actions pointed to an initiation of relaxed relations between the two sides. For instance, Indian police guards at that point in time abstained from checking cars entering the Chinese Embassy to identify visitors for a diplomatic reception.<sup>9</sup> On August 26, 1970 the External Affairs Minister stated in the Rajya Sabha: “We do notice a slight change in the attitude of China towards the propaganda against her neighbours including India, of late, but we have not yet seen any change in the substantive matters so far as the Chinese stand towards India is concerned.”<sup>10</sup>

However, in 1971 India attracted mixed signals from China over the involvement in the creation of Bangladesh. On April 6, 1971 an NCNA broadcast accused India for “flagrantly interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan”. Then on April 12, Premier Chou En-Lai in a personal message to President Yahya Khan assured him of China’s support to Pakistan in the eventuality of Indian aggression. Subsequently, in early July, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wrote to Chou En-Lai about the East Pakistan crises, expressing the desire for discussions at whichever level China chose.<sup>11</sup> Till July 1971, an uncertain situation prevailed but thereafter, the Indian and Chinese Ambassadors to Poland confabulated with each others. Subsequently, in August 1971, the Indian government received messages via the BBC and New York Times that Chou En-Lai was keen on normalising ties.<sup>12</sup>

India and Soviet Union signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, friendship and cooperation on August 9, 1971.<sup>13</sup> Regarding the treaty K. Subramanyam felt that; the Indian action was designed to countervail the expected pressures and possible military moves by the US and China against India.<sup>14</sup> India was of the view that the Indo-Soviet treaty did not stand in the way of our normalisation with China. It was not directed against China or any other country.<sup>15</sup> In the same month China invited an Indian table tennis team to participate in the Afro-Asian Friendship Tournament scheduled for November in Beijing. On October 5, Chou En-Lai was reported to have said the Indo-Soviet Treaty was not “directed against China”. In response, Mrs. Gandhi welcomed Mr. Chou En-Lai’s positive comment on the nature of the Indo-Soviet Treaty on October 7.<sup>16</sup> Viewing the complexities of the issues between both the countries showed concern in this connection and expressed that the leaders of India and China could not pretend that bilateral relations had been good ....the issues involved between them were most difficult and even .....emotional but nothing could be solved without basic good will and effort.

Thereafter on October 27, Prime Minister Gandhi dispatched a congratulatory message to Premier Chou En Lai on China’s entry into the UN.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Gandhi expressed India’s desire for “working in close cooperation

with China in the interest of peace and progress in Asia and throughout the world.”<sup>18</sup> On November 3, India was among 48 nations thanked for supporting China’s admission into UN at a banquet held by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.<sup>19</sup>

In complete contrast to the smooth course of bilateral relations on November 29, 1971 Indian diplomats staged a walk-out from a Beijing reception to protest against Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian’s provocative remarks on India. On December 3, 1971, the Chinese People’s Daily charged India with plotting to dismember Pakistan by the creation of Bangladesh in its eastern wing. Surprisingly, the same day, Pakistan launched a pre-emptive air strike on India triggering hot war between the two countries. On December 5, China followed up with a draft resolution in the UN accusing India of launching a ‘large scale’ attack against Pakistan.<sup>20</sup>

India’s stature rose considerably in international community as India remained supportive and practical in the birth of Bangladesh during December 1971. In a broader sense, India triumphed against the triangular Sino-US-Pak axis during the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict (that helped to create Bangladesh) due to Soviet political and military support. For India, this was a significant strategic development, initiated against the wishes of a super power and a major power the US and China respectively. These developments, however, were viewed negatively from Sino-centric perspective. Essentially China felt threatened by the heightened strategic stature that India acquired; besides she disliked the significance the Soviet Union gained in this process, hence China turned reluctant towards India after 1971.<sup>21</sup>

In the background of this India had expressed its readiness to hold bilateral discussions with China on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence.<sup>22</sup> However, New Delhi’s keenness failed to evoke any response from Beijing. Relations between India and China started to normalise but in the year of 1971 it was a mixed reaction from both the sides. Some where pensive attitude and indifference can be felt and somewhere cordial glimpses were exhibited.

In January 1972, China alleged India was sponsoring a “reactionary mutiny” in Tibet the following year the Chinese Government renewed the cartographical aggression against India by publishing documents where in Indian territory along their common frontier was shown as Chinese.<sup>23</sup> In 1972 the Chinese Press made a statement detrimental to cordial relations with India that in its view India was “conducting frantic anti-China activities and interfering in our internal affairs .....”<sup>24</sup>

Apparently India did not take any serious note of this statement. On April 25, 1972 a member Dasaratha Deb (CPM) stated in Parliament that regarding normalisation of relations with China formidable steps “should be thought over to open the negotiation and settle the dispute with China”. The view found support from another member Dinesh Singh (Congress) who emphasised the need to be flexible in our dealings with China.<sup>25</sup> External Affairs Minister Swarn Singh reiterated in the Lok Sabha on April 26, 1972 that “the Indo-Soviet bilateral ties did not stand in the way of normalisation of relations with China. It was not directed against China or any other country. India could not accept the view that the state of cordial relationship with one country might deterus from developing friendship with any third country. This was obviously with reference to India’s relations with USSR and our desire to develop normal relations with China. The Soviet Union had been trying to normalise relations with China and would be happy to see normalisation between India and China”.<sup>26</sup> On April 27, Swaran Sng h expressed India’s keenness to resolve the boundary problem with China. Once again on May 19 he re-stated India’s policy to normalise relations with China. A month later on June 19 the Chinese Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Mr. Tsung Kowen expressed hope that India and China would soon exchange ambassadors.<sup>27</sup>

India’s External Affairs Minister was quite categorical in saying at the UN General Assembly session in October 1972 that China did not show the necessary response despite their intentions to resume normal relations with that country in the mutual interest of both the countries.<sup>28</sup> On November 30, 1972 the Minister of External Affairs made a comprehensive statement in Parliament

expressing the policies of India and China. He said: “It is our firm belief that India and China must normalise their relations on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence. It is necessary that positive steps must be taken by both sides for this purpose. We are willing and ready to hold bilateral discussions with China on the problems that bedevil our mutual relations. We hope and believe that in the vital interests of peace and stability in Asia, India and China would be able to take positive steps towards normalisation of relations on the basis of mutual respect, equality and reciprocity”.<sup>29</sup> Despite such seemingly favourable utterances, Mr. Swaran Singh on December 7 commented that China was unresponsive towards India’s friendly diplomatic initiatives.<sup>30</sup>

The year 1972 marked the tenth anniversary of the Chinese aggression which had shaken the nation to the core. The bitterness of Chinese betrayal and disillusionment with its behaviour was so sharp that it took approximately ten years to New Delhi to think of restoring medium of normalising its relations with Beijing. The hurt of 1962 continued to rankle in many hearts and was not easily forgotten.

The commencement of the year 1973 witnessed some minor changes in the attitude of the Chinese suggesting some relaxation in their rigidity. In maintaining diplomatic formality, the Chinese became a little more dignified. A Vice Minister of China attended India’s Republic day reception in Beijing in 1973 to which hardly any Chinese dignitary was ever seen on this occasion since 1962. A military attaché in the Chinese embassy in New Delhi attended the navy day. Indian leadership did not read much in these gestures as they did when Mao Tse-Tung gave a patronising smile to the Indian Charge d’Affairs in 1970.<sup>31</sup> But such gestures did show some change in Chinese mind. Two Asian neighbours were getting friendly was evident from the Chinese Ambassador’s attendance at the Republic Day function on January 26, 1973 at India House in London. Then on February 23, Mr. Swaran Singh informed the Rajya Sabha that it was evident that China was: considering the question of normalising relations with India.<sup>32</sup>

In March 1973, China, sent a new charge d'affairs to New Delhi, after a lapse of nearly 18 months and this was a positive step. Further, some improvement on the diplomatic front was noticeable and increased contacts between the Indian and Chinese diplomats were reported from many world capitals. China also toned down anti-Indian propaganda in a limited way. In April, China invited an Indian team to play in a Table Tennis Tournament to be held at Beijing in August.<sup>33</sup>

On April 23, 1973 a member H. Kishore Singh (Congress) cautioned Parliament that China would lay down conditions of Aksai Chin and the McMahon Line that the Indian psyche was not ready to accept. Another member who was also against significant concessions on the Aksai Chin issue further took this up. He stated that it "...should be made clear so China's normalisation of relations is one thing and acquiescence with Chinese territorial claims is another thing".<sup>34</sup>

On June 24, 1973, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said, that India was "throwing out feelers" to renew relations with China.<sup>35</sup> The US ambassador John Galbraith went on a private visit to Beijing in June 1973. The Chinese Foreign Minister Chi Peng Fei told him that China was interested in improving its relations with India as part of its general desire for mutually beneficial contacts with all the three countries of the subcontinent.

The new Indian envoy L.L. Malhotra took up his assignment as Charge d'Affairs in Beijing in the first week of August 1973. He reached there at a time when there had been several indications pointing to the possibility of an improvement in the relations between the two countries. The two countries had stopped the propaganda warfare at the border which had been going on for some years.<sup>37</sup> These events clearly indicated that China now wanted to be more realistic in its dealings with India. On August 16, 1973 the Minister of State for External Affairs told the Lok Sabha that India was set to begin trade relations with China as a part of the normalisation process.<sup>38</sup>

Another event took place in November 1973 that changed the Chinese's thinking. In that year Brezhnev visited India apparently with one object in view namely to let the Indian leadership know about the Collective Asian Security Concept which he wanted to sell to all Asian nations in order to create a bulwark against any Chinese threat. The Chinese knew that it was directed against them and if India accepted it, it would mean perpetual enmity between the two countries. When the idea was referred to Indian leaders in a speech by Brezhnev before the members of Indian Parliament, the response was not at all encouraging. Indian leaders plainly told Brezhnev that it would not suitably fit in the parameters of Indian Foreign policy. All this encouraged China to take a positive attitude towards Indian approach.<sup>39</sup>

The next year on April 29, 1974 the Indian government permitted the All India Kotnis Memorial Committee's delegation to visit China to promote goodwill between the two countries.<sup>40</sup> But the entire scenario changed when India went for its Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) at Pokharan in May 1974. China's antipathy towards India increased. There was, of course, no immediate reaction from China to India's PNE. In the wake of Indian Nuclear Test, China assured Pakistan of its "full and resolute support in its struggle in defence of its national independence and sovereignty against foreign aggression and interference, including that against nuclear threat and nuclear blackmail".<sup>41</sup> Acquisition of nuclear power within so short period of about two years after its major success in Bangladesh war was clearly suggestive of India's ambition to dominate the region. While criticizing India's move the Chinese sought to speak on behalf of other Asian countries. The Chinese Vice-Premier Teng Hsiaopeng in a statement alleged that by carrying out the test, India was seeking to scare neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. He questioned why it was exploded close to Pakistan's border and so soon after Bhutto had returned home after a successful visit to China.

The Chinese did not at all believe in the assurance of Indian leaders that the nuclear test was concluded to examine the potential of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.<sup>42</sup> On June 16 Prime Minister Gandhi, while speaking

at a meeting of the Foreign Correspondent Association for South Asia in New Delhi, said: “We welcome friendship with China. But it has to be a two-way affair”.<sup>43</sup> The nuclear explosion of India in 1974 was not looked very positively by China. It did not trust in Indian assurance that the test was for peaceful purposes and criticised as if India was trying to dominate the region.

On January 13, 1975, Chinese Vice-Minister for Cultural, Sports and Physical Affairs said that the, “Chinese People have always very friendly sentiments for the Indian people”. He was speaking to newsman at Calcutta as the leader of the Chinese delegation to attend the 33<sup>rd</sup> World Table Tennis Championship. During his brief halt at Calcutta airport on his way from Beijing to Kathmandu, the Chinese Vice-Premier Chen Xilian told the press on February 26, 1975 that, “China was ready for talks”.<sup>44</sup> And his country and India would finally have friendly relations and the ‘twists and turns of relationship between the two countries would not continue for long.’<sup>45</sup>

On April 15, 1975, Madhav Rao Scindia warned the Government about the complacency, which had set into its policy with China. He opined that it was not a wise step from the Indian part to accept territorial losses, which suited Chinese national interests. Mr. Scindia stated: “our Foreign Ministers must ensure that in our game of diplomatic ping-pong with China, we play the role of a bat and not a ball”.<sup>46</sup> The intractability of the border dispute arises because both sides have strong cases on it. Indian claim to Aksai Chin has no basis in treaty, usage or geography such as the watershed principle. While India’s claim to the McMahon Line has a firm basis in geography as well as usage, it has no basis in a valid international treaty.<sup>47</sup> Applying historical evidence towards a solution has not made much headway either.

A few months later there was another border skirmish between Chinese and Indian troops in the eastern sector. The timing of the skirmish coincided with the date of the 1962 border war – 20<sup>th</sup> October. Whether this was a symbolic reminder or mere coincidence – is difficult to say. On October 20, 1975 approximately 40 Chinese soldiers crossed over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and killed four Indian soldiers.<sup>48</sup> The Indian Government

lodged a strong protest with the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi against the “unprovoked” and unjustified firing.<sup>49</sup> In response, China refuted these charges and instead accused the Indians for coming across the LAC at Tulung La. It is important to note that China ignored the matter keeping in view of the above incidents, the Ministry of External Affairs concluded that inspite of constant endeavours to establish normal relations with China there was no positive attempt from the Chinese side. Resultantly, there was no remarkable change in Sino-Indian relations.

On January 8, 1976 Chou En- Lai passed away. Mrs. Gandhi herself went to the Chinese embassy in New Delhi to sign the condolence register. This was in exact reciprocation of what Chou En- Lai himself had done at the time of Nehru’s death in May 1964. China took a special note of it and to convey their appreciation of the gesture to the government of India, a Vice-Minister was deputed to go to meet the Indian Charge ‘d’ Affaires and tell him that the Chinese people in the moment of their grief shared the sentiments of goodwill with the Indian people in all their mutual dealings. The Chinese probably wanted to use this sad event to start some fresh initiative from their side to end the prolonged stalemate in Sino-Indian relations. The Indian envoy was also reported to have been told by the Chinese Minister that if India took some concrete steps in this respect, China would not fail to respond in an appropriate manner.<sup>50</sup> This is what India needed and got though on a sad occasion. It took the two sides 14 years to repair their ruptured relations. For India the Himalayan humiliation was a traumatic experience and had to be avoided in future. And the only way to achieve this objective was to ensure conventional deterrent capability along with good relations with China<sup>51</sup>

Lord Trevelyan, a British diplomat, referring to Sino-Indian relations, emphasised the importance of normalisation, while addressing the Press Corps on January 9, 1976 at Bombay. He seemed to have spoken with an eye on the shape of things. Only a few months later India announced her decision to appoint an Ambassador to China.<sup>53</sup> On April 15, 1976, the External Affairs Minister, Y. B. Chavan announced in the Parliament that after mutual

consultation India and China had agreed to resume diplomatic representation in both the countries at ambassadorial level. This, he said, would hold out the prospect of a progressive improvement in Sino-Indian relations. He also announced that K.R. Narayanan a Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry was appointed as the new ambassador to China. He also assured that our initiative to raise the level of our diplomatic representation would be followed by China.<sup>53</sup>

The new Chinese Prime Minister Hua Guofeng was installed in power in May 1976. Mrs. Gandhi, as a matter of protocol requirement sent him a greeting message to which his reply was more than a routine official communication; it was constructive in respect of bilateral relations. It was clear that it was the time when Chinese response would be positive if India took some concrete step to improve relations between the two countries.<sup>54</sup>

The new envoy K.R. Narayanan reached Beijing on July 7, 1976. Despite the mourning in Beijing over the death of Chu Teh, Chairman of the National People's Congress, he met Chio Kuan-Huo, Foreign Minister within three days of his arrival. Before K.R. Narayanan could present his credentials, Chinese government named on July 12, 1976, Chen Chao-Yuan, its envoy in Spain, as its ambassador to India. Chen Chao-Yuan of 58 years was not a stranger to New Delhi; he had been the counsellor in the Chinese embassy from 1963 to 1970. By restoring the diplomatic missions to the ambassadorial level, the two governments could be said to have created an adequately high channel of communication.<sup>55</sup> In his first official statement, the Chinese Ambassador stated that full normalisation of Sino-Indian relations through joint efforts was in full accord with the interests of the people of the two nations, and expressed the hope that the friendship between the two nations would grow further and bilateral relations would improve.<sup>56</sup>

K.R. Narayanan presented his credentials on July 24 to Wu Ten, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in Beijing. The Chinese envoy who was to present his credentials on September 18, 1976 had to do so on September 20 as the function was postponed

following the death of Mao Tse-Tung. Though there was nothing new in the speeches of the President and the Chinese envoy that had not been said before, the tone and tenor of their observations were intended by both sides to consolidate the present atmosphere for carrying forward the process of normalisation.<sup>57</sup>

In the mid-seventies significant changes took place in both Chinese and Indian internal politics. These political changes provided an opportunity for the new leaders of both nations to reassess and reorient their policies towards each other amidst the changed context of international relations. In order to concentrate on domestic modernisation, China took steps to improve relations with the neighbours, as peaceful borders was necessary for the modernisation. There are many other factors which compelled China to come closer to India during 1970s are:

1. China recognised the fact that India had become the most important power centre in South Asia after 1971, and that no combination of other South Asian countries could balance India.
2. Indo-Soviet friendship treaty is also one of the factor which compel China to create a positive atmosphere for Sino-Indian bilateral relations in the fact of Sino-Soviet confrontation.<sup>58</sup>
3. China's security considerations on its western front, especially in Tibet. Political unrest and ethnic strife kept the situation in Tibet far from normal. The Dalai Lama and thousands of refugees from Tibet were living in Indian territory. Security on western front apparently required India's cooperation.
4. Finally, the American defeat in the Vietnam war and its growing domestic crises forced the United States to reduce its presence in East Asia. Chinese leaders were concerned about Soviet efforts to fill the power vacuum by proposing the Asian Collective Security regime. Vietnam began to lean towards Soviet Union and took steps to bring all Indo-China under its own control excluding Chinese influence there. Under such circumstances, it was imperative for China to take steps diplomatically to stabilise Sino-Indian relations in order to foil the perceived Soviet designs in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>59</sup>

In the context of the changed scenario, the Chinese leader on their part had weighted the issue very carefully before responding to the Indian initiative

for the restoration of ambassadorial level relationship. The Indian move had certainly helped Chinese to give the impression that their political turmoil between radicals and moderates, at the home front had made no differences to the basic foreign policy pursuits.

Soon after the establishment of ambassadorial level relations, a series of interactions in the form of exchange of visits started taking place. A major delegation of non-official led by Wang Bing-Nan visited India of which Prof. J. Xianlin, Vice-President of Beijing University was a member. This was followed by a visit of Prof. Huang Ki-Chuan, director of the Institute of South Asian Studies. He visited several centres of advanced studies in India. These two visits started a process of gradual establishment of non-official contacts between the two countries.<sup>60</sup> The Parliamentary Consultative Committee on External Affairs lauded the process of normalisation on December 22. In 1976 there was a slight change in the Chinese stand over the Kashmir issue.<sup>61</sup>

The year 1976 marked a turning point in China's destiny. With the death during that year of the three great leader of the Chinese Revolution – Chou En-Lai, Chu Teh, Mao Tse-Tung a new set of leader with new convictions came to the force. And with this, came new wave of liberalism in the economic, political and social fields commenced. China has embarked upon an ambitious modernisation programme and is now opening itself out increasingly to the outside world. Contacts at the official and unofficial levels have intensified and the outlook for trade with India has improved to a considerable degree.<sup>62</sup>

A year after the resumption of full diplomatic relations the Congress Party was voted out of office and the Janata Party came to power in March 1977 and Mr. Morarji Desai became the new Prime Minister. Reacting to the political development, Chinese Prime Minister Hua Guofeng sent a congratulatory message to his new Indian counterpart, Morarji Desai and hope that, “the traditional friendship between Peoples of China and India would develop”. There was obvious optimism in China about a reorientation in India's foreign policy at this juncture.<sup>63</sup> During the Janata government's period the

continuity of the normalisation process never slackened due to the lack of initiative. On March 11, Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Chairman Foreign Relations Committee, Wang Bing Nan discussed the border dispute in New Delhi. The Chinese delegation conveyed their intentions regarding a peaceful solution to the dispute. Moreover Yu Chu highlighted this consideration to Barun Sen Gupta, an Indian journalist during a visit to Beijing in June 1977.<sup>64</sup> External Affairs Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said that the Indian ships were allowed to visit Chinese ports so as to step up bilateral trade.

Despite cordial relations between the Asian giants, the Tibetan factors continued to be an irritant between them. On July 22, the Tibetan religious leader, Dalai Lama met Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram at New Delhi. The meeting was criticised by Chinese Charge'd' Affairs, Liu Hsing-fu on August 4. He protested with the Indian Government against its leader's meeting the Dalai Lama and accused the Government about interfering in Chinese domestic affairs. In response to it, on August 6 the Government refuted the Chinese allegation that its parleys with the Dalai Lama amounted to interference in Chinese internal affairs. On August 29, Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, who addressed army officers and other rank at Fort William, Calcutta, referred to the upswing in relations with China said that there were: "positive signs of improvement in our relations with China". Otherwise the Janata Government pursued a rigid policy on the border dispute. This is evident from Prime Minister Morarji Desai's statement to a Japanese newspaper 'Yomiuri Shimbun'. He said: that "our territory is in the possession of China. Therefore they have to take the next step. We will respond adequately."<sup>65</sup>

It is important to note, Dr. P.C. Chunder, a Cabinet Rank Minister, represented the Indian Government after a 16 years gap at the Chinese National Day reception in New Delhi on September 30.<sup>66</sup> It shows that the Janata Government, like its predecessor regime kept up the pace of normalisation. When Janata Government inherited a situation from the Congress Government, two courses were open to them, one, unless the territorial dispute was settled

there should be no contacts with China; two, to remain firm on their territorial claims but, at the same time continue to try to normalise relations with China. The Janata Government had chosen the second course.<sup>67</sup> China welcomed this development for the reason that a party which acted as a proxy of the Soviet Union was ousted. The Chinese were more interested in the decline of Soviet Union influence in Indian politics. In his first statement Morarji Desai clearly stated that his government in following the policy of non alignment would be completely free to take all foreign policy decisions without being under the pressure from any big power.

Chinese were now hopeful that they would have a fair deal at the hands of Desai and they felt encouraged to take the first chance to sound the new Prime Minister and see how he react to what they had to say initially. They sought to do this through an emissary, the Albanian leader Ceausescu. Morarji Desai, told him bluntly that his government would not respond to such overtures made by third parties. 'If the Chinese were sincere, let them contact me directly' Morarji said.<sup>68</sup>

The Chinese took it seriously and announced to send a high-power delegation to India, under the leadership of Mr. Wang Bing Nan. The visit was at the instance of the Kotnis Memorial Committee. On March 8, Mr. Bing Nan and the Chinese Ambassador Chen Chou-Yuan met the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee in New Delhi. He conveyed his government's invitation regarding a visit to China.<sup>69</sup> This was the first important delegation China has sent to India after the 1962 hostilities. Ji Xianlin, the most prominent Indologist in China was among the delegates. He had deep understanding about the centuries old history of Sino-Indian cultural exchange.<sup>70</sup> Mr. Desai clarified all ups and downs which remained between India and China and told the delegation that China had done us a great harm when we, as friends of China tried to do everything good for it. India has been its well wisher since Republic of China came into existence after 1949 revolution but Chinese behaviour was most of the time subtle and unpredictable. Mr. Desai referred Japanese attack of 1937 when India

supported it. He said that India was second who gave Republic of China recognition in UN. He further said that it was India who pleaded for China's permanent seat in Security Council. And by extending so much for China India had to face resentment of western countries but it remained firm and perseverant on its stand. Mr. Desai desperately said that despite shielding China so much what India got in reciprocity was only indifferent behaviour, violation at border seizure of 14000 sq km of area and sometimes very harsh moves. Lastly he sarcastically said that under these conditions, how could you expect us to become friends?

Wang heard patiently and suggested that the two governments should meet and talk over these matters to find an amicable solution of the disputed issues.<sup>71</sup> Following Wang's visit, many journalists found their way to China. But on the other hand, in a statement before the Indian Parliament, Prime Minister Morarji Desai said, "We want to have good relations with every one, including China. He stated clearly that till the matter relating to our territory in Chinese possession is decided, there cannot be full friendship between two countries." On April 19, 1978, the then Vice-Foreign Minister of China, Han Niang-Lung said in Beijing that though India had not taken any "positive" action to improve relations with China the border issue between the two government could be frozen and that both sides could discuss other problems.<sup>72</sup> The Vice-President of the Chinese National People's Congress Ulanhu said on May 29, 1978, that if India had any views on simultaneous pursuit of border solution and normalisation of relations, "We would like to discuss them". He was confident that a solution would be found.

BG Verghese, a prominent Indian journalist went to China in June, 1978 alongwith four other journalists at the invitation of the Chinese Government and came back with impression that China was keen to improve relations with India. On the other hand India's attitude toward China was that India would not go to war with China or use force to solve the boundary question, was clear from the Vajpayee's statement of July 20, 1978 in a Parliament. All these steps

show some positive sign toward normalisation of relations between the two countries.<sup>73</sup>

Dr. Subramaniam Swamy's visit to China in September 1978, was significant – as the first Indian politician to enter China following the 1962 war. He had discussions on bilateral relations with the Chinese Premier and other leaders. The border issue formed the first item for discussions on his agenda. A highlight of the visit was Mr. Swamy's meeting with Deng Xiaoping. Swamy gives a gist of what the Chinese leader told him. To quote: "China is prepared to discuss the border question till we can reach a mutually accepted negotiated settlement. In return I think India ought to prepare some alternative for the negotiation. We should be prepared to discuss some exchanges in Territory. For example why not ask for the Kailash Mansarovar portion of Tibet in return for parts of Aksai Chin". Thus this visit was a small but sure step forward in the normalization process.<sup>74</sup>

On October 6, the Chinese External Affairs Minister, Huang Hua in New York said that China was keen on solving all problems with India peacefully applying Panchsheel principles.<sup>75</sup> This was the first meeting between Foreign Ministers of the two countries since 1960, resulted in an agreement from both sides on the need for developing trade and cultural links as well as cooperation in the field of science and technology.<sup>76</sup> However, the rigidity on the border dispute persisted as evident from Prime Minister Desai's statement at a public meeting in Tezpur. He said that the recovery of the Indian Territory from China was a prerequisite for good relations with that country. The Government of India announced Vajpayee would visit China in October 1978. The visit, however, had to be cancelled on account of Vajpayee's poor health.

### **Atal Bihari Vajpayee's China Visit:**

Indian External Affairs Minister Shri A.B. Vajpayee visited China in February 12-18, 1978 where he exchanged views with Chinese leaders on normalisation of Sino-Indian relations. It was the highest level visit between

the two countries since Chou En-Lai's April 1960 India's visit. It was also the first time ever that an Indian External Affairs Minister had gone to China. Mr. Vajpayee was accompanied by eight diplomats from the Indian Foreign Services including the Foreign Secretary and over 20 journalists.<sup>77</sup> The focus of the visit was, on the complex and difficult questions in their relations.<sup>78</sup> Mr. Vajpayee held three rounds of talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua and met Deng Xiaoping, the Vice-Premier and Hua Guofeng, the Premier of China. During his discussions with the Chinese leaders, Vajpayee discussed the boundary issue, China's support for insurgency in India, Sikkim issue, and China's pro-Pakistan stand on Kashmir etc. issues.<sup>79</sup> The Chinese Foreign Minister, Huang Hua described Vajpayee's visit as significant in Sino-Indian relations and as a good beginning for further strengthening friendly relations. He recalled the past contacts between the people of the two countries who now under new dispensation wanted to grow more friendly towards each other.<sup>80</sup>

In his meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua, Vajpayee referred to China's support to Naga and Mizo insurgents in northeast region. He received satisfactory assurance for stopping such support from the Chinese government.<sup>81</sup> While on the other hand Chinese referred to the presence and activities of the Dalai Lama, Vajpayee gave them two-fold assurance. Firstly, if the conditions were suitable for his return to Tibet, India would not stand in the way and secondly, the Dalai Lama was being extended the courtesy due to the head of a religion. None of his followers was allowed to carry on any political activities. In this context Vajpayee made a fresh suggestion that if the Chinese authorities would extend adequate facilities to Indian pilgrims to visit Kailash and Mansarover, it would be regarded as a symbol of China's desire to improve relations with India. The Chinese did not seem to have given any serious thought to this problem as in their view, this as well as other matters of inter-border contacts would come for review at a proper time.

Vajpayee was quite candid in telling the Chinese that India would have no objection to China having bilateral relations with Pakistan but he warned that if these relations adversely affected our legitimate interest it would surely

impeded the prospects of improvement of Sino-Indian relations. Illustrating his point from the example of Kashmir he said that non-recognition of India's legitimate interests in the problem would also retard the progress of cordiality between India and China. He assured them that as India was committed to solve this issue through bilateral dialogue it would resent outside interference in this matter. The Chinese seemed to have understood the implications of Vajpayee statement. As subsequent events confirmed, the Chinese became more realistic in their approach to this delicate issue in so far as they began to say that it was essentially a bilateral issue between the two countries which could be immediately solved by negotiations.

Another issue that Vajpayee took up was about the construction of the Karakoram highway through the Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Chinese assured him that cooperation with Pakistan in this matter did not imply that they had accepted the Pakistani ownership of Kashmir; it was an adhoc arrangement subject to the final solution of the Kashmir problem.<sup>82</sup>

During a meeting with Vajpayee on February 14, 1979, Chinese Vice-Premier, Deng Xiaoping proposed his famous "package deal" for the Sino-Indian boundary issue. The so called "package deal" of Deng was swap Eastern Sector for Western Sector.<sup>83</sup> He elaborated that India held under its control areas with rich natural resources, where as the Chinese held areas were not economically useful and also uninhabitable. It would be advisable to have a comprehensive solution. He also felt that the only problem between India and China was the boundary question and if both countries failed to find a resolution, it would be left to later generations to deal with. This marked the commencement of a gradual development of cooperation in functional fields after a break of more than two decades.<sup>84</sup> Vajpayee's reply was that this was an old Chinese proposal and that a beginning could be made by trying to tackle those areas where there was less dispute. Nevertheless, both sides emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity all along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).<sup>85</sup> Chinese Vice-Premier, Deng said: "we should seek common ground while reserving our differences. As for the boundary question,

we can solve it though peaceful consultation. This question should not prevent us from improving our relations in other fields”.<sup>86</sup> He further added, “let us put aside the problem on which we have real difference, we can go slow on them, meanwhile, let’s do some realistic things for development of relations between our two countries. China and India are the most populous countries of the world, how can we remain unfriendly!”<sup>87</sup>

The five principles of peaceful co-existence were reaffirmed as the basis of normalisation of bilateral relations and settlement of the border dispute.<sup>88</sup> On February 15, Mr. Vajpayee had a 40 minute meeting with Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng, where in he invited the latter to visit India.<sup>89</sup> Mr. Hua Guofeng said more contacts between leaders of China and India will help in deepen mutual understanding and friendship. Sino-Indian relations will grow splendidly so long as both sides abide by the five principles of peaceful co-existence.<sup>90</sup> While Vajpayee was about to leave China, China attacked Vietnam. Vajpayee immediately cut short his visit and hurried back home. Prime Minister Morarji Desai, on February 18, before Vajpayee returned, expressed his profound ‘shock and distress’ at the out break of hostilities which could endanger world peace. It was indeed very odd that China took this action when Vajpayee was still on the Chinese soil.

It was assumed in certain circles that the Chinese action was borne out of their suspicion that India was still a client of the Soviet Union and it got accentuated, when the Janata government, contrary to Chinese expectations continued to pursue cordial relations with the Soviet Union. India’s support to Vietnam’s national aspirations for its international status may have also irritated China. Another reason could be that the attack served as a warning of similar treatment to be meted out to any state trying to challenge China particularly those states which China believed were backed by the Soviet Union.

It was a warning to India not to rely too much on the support of the Soviet Union. India was supposed to keep in view that China was a dominant power in Asia and that India could not exceed the assumed status that it had

acquired with the backing of the Soviet Union. It also implied that China would not accept any pre-conditions for normalisation. However, a more charitable interpretation could be that it was a mere coincidence that they had to take that punitive action against Vietnam, they had already made preparations for it earlier and they could not delay it. Whatever be the reason, it did a great harm to the ongoing political dialogue that had happily begun between the two countries after a couple of decades.<sup>91</sup> The progress toward normalisation has slowed down considerably.

The Sino-Indian relations existing since 1962 underwent a sea-change, namely, an acknowledgement that the boundary dispute would take time to resolve.<sup>92</sup> Both side realised that some of the problems between the two countries are complex and difficult and it might not be possible to solve them in just one or two visits. They agreed, however, that the talks were useful and in the nature of ‘a preliminary and exploratory exchange of views’, which would provide the basis for resolving the boundary question.<sup>93</sup>

It was not, however, the expectation on either side that Vajpayee’s visit to Beijing can resolve this difficult problem which concerns differences between the two countries involving approximately 50,000 square miles. But the willingness on both sides to recognise the question as crucial to the establishment of better relations between the two countries is, in itself, a significant step forward.<sup>94</sup>

On the political front there has been limit progress towards normalisation of relations. Leaders of the two countries have made known their intention to improve ties but there has not been a tangible breakthrough in 1970s. Janata Party’s foreign policy was never successful simply because it lacked political stability as factionalism prevailed among its members. As a result such a state of affairs was not conducive to negotiations with China. Eventually the Janata regime ended on July 1979 and the Congress Party came back to power.<sup>95</sup>

In a minute survey of Sino-Indian relations during 1970s – few points emerge from discussion. In beginning or early 1970s the process from both the sides is slow but a good beginning was heralded. Gradually mutual talks and conferences brought intensity in the efforts and feeling to bring peace and permanent solution. But the main problem that hindered the entire scene – was the border, lack of political will or preparation of ‘mind set’ of decision making authorities from both the sides, change of leadership, domestic problems, industrialization, population explosion change in international system, national interest and Chinese aggression on Vietnam during Vajpayee’s visit are some of the factors responsible for retarding the forwarding good relations between India and China. However, much was still to be achieved, because it was only the beginning of negotiated settlement and not a complete compromise of co-existence or any boundary solution.

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