

# CHAPTER IV

## **Chapter-IV**

### **Signs of Flexibility - Eight Rounds of Talks**

The first efforts began to attempt a restoration of normalcy in the 1970s. The boundary question has become a serious hindrance, the Chinese have maintained that since the differences on the border are so wide and the two positions so intractable, the best thing to do is leave the border dispute to one side and get along with other things. India has insisted that normalcy is not possible without progress on the border issue since it was the border, which created the abnormalcy in the first place. Atal Behari Vajpayee took the initiative by going to China, and then Indira Gandhi continued the process through annual consultations.<sup>1</sup>

Though the border question was mentioned at several meetings between the Indian and Chinese leaders from the 1970s, concrete bilateral talks on its settlement were initiated only in the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> The Congress Party regained the reins of power in January 1980, as the Janata government was voted out of the office. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, as the new Prime Minister again took an immense interest in normalising relations with China.<sup>3</sup> By the beginning of 1980's, China was moving away from the old rigidities of Maoist era. The Chinese Premier, Hua Guofeng, on January 15, 1980 extended warm congratulations to Mrs. Gandhi, on her assumption of the office of Premiership.<sup>4</sup> He said that, "we are happy to see that the relations between China and India have improved and developed over the last few years and we hope that this trend will continue to develop in the interest of peace and stability in Asia". This showed that both India and China wanted to reduce the tensions.

For instance, the Presidential Address to Parliament on January 23, 1980 indicated the Government's keenness "to discuss all issues with China, including the boundary question, in search of peaceful solution based on equality".<sup>5</sup> Further, on January 26, 1980, Huang Hua the Chinese Foreign Minister attended India's Republic Day celebration at the Indian embassy in

Beijing. This was the first time in 20 years that the Chinese Foreign Minister had graced the annual event. Hua stressed that, “the present turbulent and tense international situation places a greater obligation on both China and India to promote mutual understanding and cooperation”.<sup>6</sup>

The turbulent and tense international situation, which the Chinese Foreign Minister was referring to started in the late 1970s; the Iranian and Afghan revolutions followed by the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan; disturbed the existing strategic balance in West Asia and South Asia. The Soviet Union also succeeded in bringing Indo-China within its sphere of influence with Vietnam as its ally. India and China differed considerably on the issues of Afghanistan and Vietnam’s role in Cambodia.

Yet both the countries had been realising for some time the need to get away from a conflictual relationship and to reduce the tensions. Mrs. Gandhi soon realised that any policy of leaning towards the Soviet Union would not serve India’s long-term security interests. She wanted to reap the benefit of greater diplomatic flexibility by expanding India’s ties with the United States, and by seeking improved relations with China. They also agreed that continued efforts to normalise Sino-Indian relations would help to maintain the strategic balance of the big powers in South Asia. China, on its part, realised that the more it denounced India, the closer it would push towards the Soviet Union. A tactical approach of softening India and there by diminishing Indo-Soviet relationship could be more fruitful. With the emergence of Deng Xiaoping as the supreme leader of China and launching of modernisation, this thinking was in consonance with the general thrust of economics taking precedence over politics.

China required a peaceful international environment, with emphasis on good relations with its neighbouring countries for successfully carrying out their economic reforms.<sup>7</sup> From the above discussion it was clear that both India and China were unanimous in their desire to improve relation.

On March 4, 1980 Mr Shen Jian was appointed as the new ambassador of China. Welcoming the new ambassador, President of India, Sanjiva Reddy hopefully said that the process of normalisation, initiated by the restoration of relations between India and China to the level of ambassador in 1976, would continue. In this connection Shen Jian the new ambassador of China said that “We firmly believe that through our joint efforts Sino-Indian relations will further grow under the guidance of the five principles”.<sup>8</sup>

On April 8, Prime Minister Mrs Gandhi had met Hua Guofeng the Chinese Premier in Belgrade and exchanged views about further promotion of bilateral relations. The Chinese Premier and Mrs. Gandhi had gone to Belgrade for the funeral of Marshal Tito.<sup>9</sup> This was the first meeting at the Prime Minister level between the two countries since Chou En-Lai’s visit to India in 1960 and both the leaders agreed to continue with the process of improving relations. Both sides stressed that better Sino-Indian relations were essential to peace and stability in Asia and there was need for mutual consultations as also avoidance of confrontation for an amicable solution of their bilateral problems.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua had a 30-minute meeting with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Salisbury (Zimbabwe) on April 18, where he said, that the outstanding issues between the two countries need not stand in the way of promoting friendly relations and cooperation. Mr. Huang Hua told Mrs Gandhi that past issue could be settled in due course; in the meantime the two countries could exchange views and understand each other better. And there was no Sino-Indian problem, which cannot be solved by negotiation. The Prime Minister told that her discussions with Mr. Huang were of a general nature and the border question did not come up in their way of negotiation.<sup>11</sup>

The External Affairs Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao in Parliamentary consultative committee on May 16 said that the task of carrying Sino-Indian relation would be tackled with great care. He observed that the core of cordial Sino-Indian relations exists in tracing out a permanent and expeditious solution to the boundary problem. He further explained that the friendship between

India and Soviet Union should not cast any shadow in the process of normalisation between India and China. Mr Rao enunciated that the national interest of any country is the most important motive to be achieved. Having a non-aligned foundation, India maintains the pursuit of its interest and hence, the Indian foreign policy would not go at the cost of any country. He concluded that India and China should be in position to discuss all their important problems including boundary dispute in a very professional manner.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, after one month Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Han Nianlong said at a banquet given in Beijing on June 20, 1980 in honour of Indian External Affairs Secretary (East) Eric Gonsalves that India and China, as the two big nations in Asia have a responsibility to safeguard peace in Asia and the world. The co-existence between India and China is a sincere desire of all peace loving people. Mr Gonsalves had a two hours discussion with Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua on bilateral and internal issues. Mr. Gonsalves gave formal invitation to Mr. Huang, to visit India. He said that his visit to Beijing is part of an effort to remove the ‘abnormal state of affairs’ between the two countries.<sup>13</sup> Boundary issues can be solved with mutual ‘understanding and concessions’ but even before that, the two sides should develop friendly cooperation, ‘when there is so much global unrest’. According to Chinese news agency Xinhua, China had never asked for the return of all the territory illegally incorporated into India by the old colonialists. There are no conflicts of ‘fundamental interest’ between China and India.<sup>14</sup> The fact that China and India maintain direct contact and dialogue shows that both Governments are willing to restore good state-to-state relations as soon as possible and are now moving toward this goal.<sup>15</sup>

Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping said on June 21, 1980, that the border problem between India and China can be solved by a package deal.<sup>16</sup> China’s suggestion of ‘package deal’ on the border dispute based on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) could be the beginning of a major initiative to solve the problem. This is no longer a signal to resume dialogue, but a diplomatic initiative.<sup>17</sup> The “Package Proposal” was very similar to an earlier abortive

proposal that Premier Chou En-Lai offered the Indian Government in 1960. It was formally spelt out in an editorial published in New China News Agency in June 1980. Based on actual control of border lines the editorial urged both countries to make concessions-China in Arunachal area and India in Ladakh area. Acceptance of this proposal according to Deng, would give legal recognition by China to the McMahon line in the Eastern Sector and in return India should recognise the status quo in the Western Sector.<sup>18</sup> In exchange China wanted India to give up its claim on 13,000 square miles in Aksai Chin area around Ladakh. Thus, China's proposal has endorsed the post 1962 war status quo, with minor modifications. To quote Deng's interview which pertains to the package proposal that he made: for instance in the Eastern Sector, we can recognise the existing status quo, I mean the so-called McMahon line? This was left over from history but in the Western Sector, the Indian government should also recognise the existing status quo.<sup>19</sup>

According to Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leaders have the same 'serious, positive and active' attitude towards improving relations with India as Mrs Indira Gandhi has. In an interview to the editor of Delhi's defence journal, Vikrant on July 20, Mr Deng wanted to convey the message to India's Prime Minister that there are points of differences between the two countries, but they are narrowing.<sup>20</sup>

Subsequently, the Chinese formally communicated the same offer to the Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee, Mr G. Parthasarthy in Beijing.<sup>21</sup> China continued to push for Deng's "package proposal", while India continued to play over cautiously and the border conflict remained unresolved. China had repeatedly offered to negotiate concessions along the Eastern Sector of the disputed border provided India conceded China's occupation of Aksai Chin. But as India thought such concession would be politically controversial there was no progress in bilateral negotiations.<sup>22</sup>

The External Affairs Minister recalled that the boundary dispute between the two countries is longstanding and complex. After a long time, the two governments have only just begun to come to grips with it once more.

This itself is a positive step. India on its part hoped to settle the border question in a spirit of the five principles of peaceful co-existence consistent with the national honour and interest of both sides on the basis of equality.<sup>23</sup>

However the package deal was not acceptable to India because it sought to legitimise Chinese occupation of territory in western sector between 1959-1962 without offering any territorial compensation to India. Therefore, acceptance of the deal was seen as being tantamount to letting the Chinese retain the territorial gains of the aggression of 1962.<sup>24</sup> Reacting calmly to proposal, the External Affairs Minister, P V Narasimha Rao submitted in Lok Sabha on July 1980 that there were more “effective options” than the “package deal”<sup>25</sup> and averred that India rejected the Chinese proposition regarding concessions in the eastern sector.

External events, however, continued to impinge on any attempt to improve relations Foreign Ministers Huang Hua, who had been scheduled to visit India later in 1980, delayed his visit because of Indian recognition of the Vietnamese-supported Heng Samrin regime in Kampuchea.<sup>26</sup> Major initiatives were taken in 1980 towards normalisation of Sino-Indian border. But no positive and concrete result came out because it sought to legitimise Chinese occupation of territory in the western sector between 1959-1962 without offering any territorial compensation to India. China was gaining from the proposal but India was not, as it was of the same nature of previous proposal offered by Premier Chou En-Lai to the Indian Government in 1960.

Endeavours to reach a thaw on border dispute and to improve Sino-Indian relations have presently entered a crucial and delicate phase. After a lapse of two decades, in 1981 the two sides have again tried to pedal the jammed bicycle of their frozen but central issue, the border between the two on the lubrication provided by mutual cooperation and exchange on other arenas.<sup>27</sup>

The Indian Government sent Dr. Subramaniam Swamy Janta Party M.P. to China for talks with the Chinese leadership on April 8, 1981.<sup>28</sup> In response, the government wanted to get a clear picture of the Chinese mind on this score

before formalising visit.<sup>29</sup> And this enabled Dr. Swamy to undertake another visit to China where he had an extended interview with Mr Deng. In the course of this interview Mr. Deng spoke about normalisation and said that the Sino-Indian border problems could be solved by ‘repeated discussion’.<sup>30</sup>

Another important outcome of this interview pertains to the Sikkim issue that had proved to be an important irritant between India and China. Mr. Deng said that, “on Sikkim our position is very clear. We made an official statement at the time of annexation. We disapprove because it is contrary both to international norms and to morality. We will not change our positions. We can never approve of the annexation, however, we have also said that we will not mention or make use of the subject when discussing Sino-Indian relations again or make use of this subject in discussing the improvement of Sino-Indian relations.

So Sikkim as an irritant ceased to have further value in bilateral relations. This was a very significant statement that indicated China was reconciled to the incorporation of Sikkim into the Indian Union. Mr. Deng also spoke about Sino -Indian military equation. He said: we can never be a threat to you nor do we think you a threat to us .....even if you were to take part of Tibet that would not be a threat to China. It is not India by itself that could be a threat. What we consider a danger is that some other force may take a hand there.<sup>31</sup>

Referring to India as the “elder brother of the sub-continent”, China had decided to send its Foreign Minister, Mr. Huang Hua, to India shortly to discuss improving relations.<sup>32</sup> Another major step in this direction was the visit of Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, Huang Hua to India on June 26, 1981. It was the first important visit to India by a Chinese leader since the late Premier Chou En-Lai’s visit in 1960. This was the return visit to Vajpayee’s 1979 China visit. During his New Delhi visit, Huang Hua had extensive talks with Indian leaders on international and bilateral issues, including the border issue. They agreed that friendly and sincere talks would promote mutual understanding reduce differences and increase points of mutual agreement.<sup>33</sup>

China agreed that the border was a vital issue that could not be just shelved but had to be resolved, and both sides agreed that their officials should resume the talks on the vexed issue. In a press conference in New Delhi on June 28, 1981, Huang Hua proposed that pending a settlement the two sides should maintain the status quo on the borders and maintain tranquillity in the border areas.

Hua stated both sides should actively promote contacts and cooperation in all domains. He further stated that, “both China and India are big countries in Asia and both are developing countries. China is willing to develop friendly contacts with India in numerous areas and to study and learn from each other.”<sup>34</sup>

A tangible gain ensuing from the visit was the decision to hold official level talks regarding both ‘bilateral problems and bilateral exchanges’, which apparently followed an understanding between the two sides that border settlement, although central to full normalisation of relations, need not be made a precondition for improvement in relations in other areas. Thus the process of normalisation was underway but it was a long and tortuous one.<sup>35</sup> His visit opened a new chapter in Sino-Indian relations, as both sides agreed to the establishment of an annual dialogue at the level of vice-ministers alternatively in Beijing and New Delhi.<sup>36</sup>

As a follow up to this visit Indian and Chinese officials started working from September 1981 towards their first official meeting to discuss the border issue. Mr Rao stated in writing to Parliament that approximately 14,500 square miles of Indian territory in Ladakh was now in Chinese possession due to Sino-Pak collusion in 1964.<sup>37</sup> In October 1981, the Chinese Press highlighted the border dispute through the denial of a visa to Mr. T L Rajkumar, Speaker of the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly to an Asian Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. China’s official news agency stated that the, “so-called Arunachal Pradesh had been set up in the Chinese territory of some 90,000 square km south of the McMahon Line in the Eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border which India has illegally occupied since the early 1950s.”<sup>38</sup> Since Arunachal was within this territory, it was objectionable to China.

In order to avoid the impasse, China issued visa on a separate paper rather than the Indian Passport. China further reminded India that the issuance of visa to this Arunachali in a separate paper should not be construed as China's acceptance to "Arunachal Pradesh" and change in China's position on Sino-Indian boundary. Another move that irked China was when 205 Indian Parliamentarians sent congratulatory message to Taiwan on October 10, at the occasion of anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of China.<sup>39</sup>

Side by side the mutual understanding was further enhanced when Mrs Gandhi met Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang at Cancun in Mexico on October 28, 1981. The meeting with the Chinese Premier had given Indira Gandhi an opportunity to resume the dialogue with China, which seems to have slowed down. Reiterations of respective border claims do not contribute anything to the betterment of relations. The time has come for India to decide what it wants to make of the future of Sino-Indian relations. Cancun meeting had opened a new chapter in Sino-Indian relations.<sup>40</sup> There could be no doubt that a qualitatively different step has been taken towards the resolution of the border dispute.

It is well known fact that the border problem between India and China was so complex and longstanding it is not possible to solve the problem in one or two meetings. Many initiatives had been taken from time to time from 1962-onward to resolve the dispute. But due to certain reasons both sides could not reach at the proper solution. The year 1981 considered to be the most important in the history of Sino-Indian relations because from that year onward both countries have decided to have official level talks on the border negotiation annually at the vice-minister level alternatively in Beijing and New Delhi.

### **The First Round of Border Negotiation:**

The first Round of Sino-Indian border talks after the 1962 conflict, were held in Beijing from December 10-14, 1981.<sup>41</sup> The Indian delegation included Eric Gonsalves, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ranjit

Sethi, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, G.N. Rao, Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, Manorama Bhalla, Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, and two other officials. The Chinese delegation composed of Han Nianlong, Vice Foreign Minister in lieu of Huang Hua, the Foreign Minister, Chen Zhaoyuan, Director of Second Asian Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ding Gu, Director of Second Department of Commission for Cultural Relations with foreign countries.<sup>42</sup> The talks consisted of three plenary sessions and of subgroup meetings devoted to boundary issues, trade and economic cooperation, cultural exchanges and science and technology.<sup>43</sup>

A lot of groundwork had been done before the process of negotiations. On account of this it was imperative for the two delegations to evolve the agenda and decide on the nature of modalities to conduct their dialogue. It should be borne in mind that this participant delegation was not vested with any “political authority.” They only had recommendatory powers and could not independently take decisions. As a result the delegations would only forward suggestions to their governments for further action.<sup>44</sup>

No progress was made in narrowing difference on border questions; rather, both parties were content to restate previously enunciated positions. China expressed its willingness to conclude a comprehensive agreement, involving China’s recognition of the McMahon line as the Eastern Sector boundary and India’s surrender of claims to the Aksai Chin. India considered this arrangement unacceptable.<sup>45</sup>

India then suggested that the 1962 Colombo Proposals served as a starting point for negotiations. The Colombo Proposals, formulated by six non-aligned Asian and African states contained the following elements; China should withdraw from the western sector, this area to become a demilitarised zone pending a final solution in east, India and Chinese forces could be positioned along the McMahon Line except for the Thagla Ridge and Longju areas where lines of control would be settled in future discussion.<sup>46</sup> But China declared the Colombo Proposals outdated. China rejected this and mooted her

own proposal of “mutual understanding and accommodation” and “package deal” that was not acceptable to India.

India then proposed sector-by-sector approach, as it was apprehensive that China might recognise the McMahon Line. The Indian side was of the view that once the legality of McMahon Line was ascertained China would make further concessions in the western sector. This approach of India according to Wang, was erroneous and overemphasised India’s unilateral interests.<sup>47</sup>

### **Problems in Negotiated Settlement of 1981 border talks:**

From the above discussion this can be concluded that despite the efforts being made by both the sides no concrete solution to the border problem could be achieved because of their differences and adamant approaches. Discussions were made on general principles and not on the actual physical, cartographic, watershed problems in the several sectors. According to a senior Indian official closely connected with this round, the Chinese did not appear interested in turning it into anything more than a propaganda exercise.<sup>48</sup>

It was also felt that Chinese proposed package would make Chinese gains on border through the use of force-legal. So, it was one sided which favoured Chinese interests only. Additionally, there was a historical problem associated with this proposal, as in many ways, it was having the same text which was proposed by Chou En-Lai in 1960. It had been rejected at that time because of Chinese claims to significant portions of land claimed by India. The intense nostalgia of the humiliating defeat inflicted on India by China in 1962 had strongly tinged their perception.<sup>49</sup> There were some of the reasons that stood in their way while negotiating border problem.

### **Prospects:**

On the other hand it resulted in a bipartite agreement to continue contracts, pursue efforts to resolve their differences on boundary dispute. They re-affirmed to strengthen friendship and work out programmes for further

exchanges in other fields.<sup>50</sup> Both sides adopted a, ‘positive attitude’,<sup>51</sup> which was conducive and mutually beneficial to further development of relations between the two countries. There was a definite air of frank and friendly exchange of views on boundary issue. The differences were obvious and well known and several rounds of concentrated discussions were still required to iron them out.<sup>52</sup> During the December talks amicable atmosphere prevailed.

Reporting the matter, the Chinese official news agency Xinhua quoted Huang Hua as saying “the talks which the Chinese and Indian officials are now holding on the boundary and other bilateral issues-will surely have a positive influence of furtherance of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries.”<sup>53</sup> Despite wide differences on the border issue it continues to be the major bone of contention; its solution shall be beneficial to the strengthening of peace and stability in Asia and the world.”<sup>54</sup> Deng Xiaoping maintained that the talks were “extremely favourable”.

No major change, which influenced the negotiation, has been India’s withdrawal of its precondition that a border settlement must precede the improvement of bilateral relations. Of course, the Indian side continued to maintain that normalisation would not be complete without a border agreement.<sup>55</sup> In other words, while continuing cooperation in various fields; a solution to the border dispute should be explored as a prerequisite to a full normalisation of relations. In a way, this realisation is a measure of success for the Chinese side that has been arguing that pending the resolution of the border dispute both sides should expand their understanding and cooperation in other areas as well. For the Indian side, despite the disperse nature of dialogue with China, resolution of the border dispute remained the ‘central’ issue of the normalisation process.<sup>56</sup>

There was a mood of relaxation and apparent willingness on both sides to improve relations in other sectors, economic, technological and multilateral, without insisting on a period bound resolution of the border dispute in practice, though certainly not in theory. Negotiations were thus going on at a snail’s pace.<sup>57</sup> The External Affairs Minister PV Narasimha Rao admitted in

Parliament that despite the progress in official level talks in Beijing, still obvious and wide differences remained between India and China on the territorial issue.<sup>58</sup> He accepted that it was beyond expectation that a substantive progress could be made in the first round but it was quite a positive step in last twenty years.<sup>59</sup> He further added that the complete normalisation of ties was possible only if complete resolutions and stability is maintained in all fields by both India and China. It was anticipated that India was considering to take the matter forward.<sup>60</sup> The first round ended without accomplishing much beyond agreeing to meet again.

### **The Second Round of Border Negotiation:**

The second round of talks on border was held from May 17 to 20, 1982 at New Delhi. The Chinese delegation had ten members led by Fu Hua, the Vice Foreign Minister and head of the Asian affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. India reappointed Eric Gonsalves as the head of the Indian delegation. At this stage the two delegations had set up four working groups to deal with the specific issue. While one group dealt exclusively with the border dispute, the other three explored the possibilities to further cooperation in science and technology, cultural affairs and property and assets. Yet the thrust of the diplomatic dialogue was to deal “with the boundary question as the central issue” as the delegations leaders Mr Eric Gonsalves and Mr. Fu Hua pointed out.<sup>61</sup>

The leader of the Chinese delegation, Fu Hua emphasized the need to expand cooperation in scientific, technical and cultural fields. The Indian side clarified New Delhi’s bargaining posture on a number of points the development of Sino-Indian relations in such fields as reciprocal trade would be severely inhibited by absence of progress in the border talks; India regarded the McMahon line as the boundary in the Eastern sector; and India’s incorporation of Sikkim was not subject to debate.<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that Beijing does not consider Sikkim to be an integral part of India. Nevertheless, Sikkim’s border with Tibet is the only Sino-Indian frontier defined by treaty—namely, the Anglo-Chinese agreement of 1890.

The May 1982 discussions were structured along the lines of the Beijing round. China again stressed the need for a comprehensive settlement transforming existing lines of control into permanent boundaries. India on its part, called for a sector by sector approach.<sup>63</sup> The Chinese side proposed five principles as the basis for settling the border problem and Indians came out with six working propositions, including besides general principles, some specific procedural and preliminary steps.<sup>64</sup> China suggested that boundary definition should rest on the following concepts: equality, friendly consultations, mutual understanding and accommodation, a fair and reasonable settlement; and a comprehensive solution. India, in turn submitted the following working propositions—a solution must be found as soon as possible, the solution should be just, taking into account the legitimate interests of both sides, a commonly agreed upon approach and basis for negotiations should be found, the proposals advanced by either side, as constituting an approach to the problem should be considered by the other. It was also held that it was necessary to consider steps to create a propitious atmosphere; and efforts should be made to settle the border issue in each aspects of each sector.<sup>65</sup>

The talks lasted for four days and views were exchanged in a “free and frank” manner on “wide ranging” issues, there still persisted “wide basic differences” on the resolution of the border dispute. However, according to an Indian official spokesman, the differences on the boundary dispute have to some extent narrowed and eliminated. The spokesman further elaborated that there was a difference of opinion between the Chinese and Indian positions in every sector of the boundary. And, there was a dispute in respect of all the three sectors. If the boundary issue had to be settled in its entirety, according to him, all disputes had to be resolved.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the Chinese position on “comprehensive” solution to the border dispute is not possible, as problems in each sector have to be solved first. The Indian side argued that swapping of territories by both countries could hardly bring about an “equitable and honourable settlement.”<sup>67</sup>

The talks ended almost in the same manner as the talks in Beijing in December, 1981-with each side trying to explore the others fall back position without really disclosing how it would prefer to solve the problem itself.<sup>68</sup>

### **Problems in Negotiated Settlement of 1982 border talks:**

Delegations from both the sides show their willingness to resolve the boundary question. But their efforts were eclipsed by the lack of political direction to both the delegations for making major advances on known but irreconcilable positions of the two countries.<sup>69</sup> No clear cut definition was available for the comprehensive settlement, the Chinese were mentioning without spelling it out. The Indian delegation, on its part, was equally cautious in its approach and avoided coming forward with its plan to resolve the dispute. The thrust of the Indian case is that 'package plan'- which leaves Aksai Chin and other areas in the western sector with the Chinese, is not acceptable to Indian. Moreover, a solution to the border problem has to be found beyond the 'package plan' and on that basis whatever belongs to India, should be returned to it. There were differences of views on finding out which place of territory is whose, was the question dogging between the two Governments at the end of the Delhi talks<sup>70</sup>. On account of the above hindrances the progress on negotiated settlement process remained slow and halting.

### **Progress in other Areas:**

The working groups on culture and science and technology at the May 1982 meeting, made considerable progress in expanding bilateral ties. It was agreed that Indian specialists on oil, railways and agriculture would visit China; reciprocal visits to India would be paid by the Chinese delegations. It was further agreed to institute a program of cultural cooperation (initially focusing on exchange of scholars, dance troupes and film & television materials), although no date for inaugurating this program was established.<sup>71</sup> Bilateral trade was also reviewed during the talks and it was found that the present level of \$100 million worth of goods exchanged between the two countries was not enough.<sup>72</sup> A review of all these fact shows that two countries were adopting

positive attitude, conducive to further development of relations between the two countries.

The Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi stated quite frankly that, “we cannot pretend that bilateral relations between India and China have been good. The issue between us are most difficult and even emotional. But nothing can be solved without basic good will and effort”.<sup>73</sup>

### **Border situation at various strategic points vis-à-vis May 1982 Talks:**

After the 1962 confrontation, the situation was as follows:

**Eastern Sector:** (Arunachal) India has whole territory up to international border, except Thangla Ridge and Longju. Tibet has passed out of the Chinese control and become a full state. The differences in this sector were marginal and easier to sort out.

**Middle Sector:** India has area up to the so-called line of actual control except for small pockets coinciding with the international border here the chances of deciding the conflict through negotiations were evident.<sup>74</sup> This area is in UP and Himachal Pradesh.

**Western Sector:** This is the most crucial area where there is an evidence of wide dispute. The Chinese are in occupation of about 14,500 square miles of Indian Territory, which to India’s reckoning belongs to India. It is known as Aksai Chin and can be subdivided into several components.<sup>75</sup> The Chinese claims seem to lack sound basis as the “shifting claim lines have forcefully demonstrated.”<sup>76</sup> It is hard to see China relinquishing its claim along the road linking Sinkiang and Tibet region Alastair Lamb’s conclusion is (though it is not the Indian position) “that the Mc Donald Carthy Line 1899 which divides Aksai Chin and follows watershed between Indus and Tarin basin leaving Xinjiang Tibet road in Chinese control constitute a valid boundary, has been contested to legitimise the Chinese occupation of territory in the western sector as a result of border war of 1962 even beyond the shifting claim lines of 1956 and 1960”.<sup>77</sup> It is here that the Chinese claim having effective control

of the large part of this territory since 1957 to 1959, five months before Mr. Chou En-Lai's visit to India to hold negotiations. China had not occupied significant sections of the area such as Chip Chap valley, Gulwan Valley, Lanakha Damchok area, Chang Chenmo and Panggong area. Kongkala across Chang Chenmo River to Damba Guru and Damchok. These areas were denominated by the Chinese 'progressive forward' policy from 1960 onwards. India thinks that the Chinese withdrawal from the Aksai Chin is essential from this area before any meaningful dialogue.

Both the countries should endeavour to maintain momentum towards achieving an acceptable solution. Complimentarily of interests and recent changes in the Chinese leadership should not be overlooked. The bogey of mutual relations is motored by the crux of all disputes, the border dispute. Fresh, concerted and systematic efforts should be enhanced to weed out the border muddle. A political problem of this sort requires political settlement, as military resorts will further malign it. Both sides should adopt a measure of "cautious optimism" and develop an attitude of mutual respect for their strategic and national interests. The need is to devise a better alternative framework. China must look at the border dispute in its totality than offering the package, as bait for strengthening its bargaining position in the western sector and appearing soft in the eastern sector.

It should however be noted that the Chinese attitude towards Sikkim, Bhutan and Kashmir cannot be brushed aside. The dangers of leaving unsolved the seemingly innocuous territorial issues are now being hammered home to the whole world by the grisly goings on in the South Atlantic over the Falk lands." It is true that the solution of the highly "complex and emotive problem is a long haul" and bound to be slow in progress. The need is to solve it at the negotiating table. Initial Chinese stand was that the border dispute can be kept aside in the refrigerator whereas more cordiality may be developed in other areas. India considered border issue to be crucial and central and the rest of the cooperation's as a natural corollary and consequential. India wanted the Colombo Proposals to become the basis of negotiated peace, where as China

considered it out dated as an aftermath of 1962 debacle.<sup>78</sup> Consequently China was busy forging a new policy of pragmatism, balance and independence, which was evidenced by its fresh negotiations with the USSR stepping back from USA and mending once unlikely fences worldwide.<sup>79</sup>

China called for a speedy end to its long standing border dispute with India and is reported to have through if agreement could not be reached, it should not affect their economic, technical and cultural relations. Solution of the border problem is imperative for the cause of peace in Asia and world as a whole.<sup>80</sup> It is the stage when the progress should be made as the decision makers cannot continue to evade hard choices. Meaningless pleasant expressions cannot solve the crux of the problem. To India, Chinese withdrawal from the occupied territory was essential to fashion any meaningful settlement.

Nehru did not realize the strategic significance of Aksai Chin till 1958, when the Chinese had built the road. Sino-Indian efforts at normalisation, of relationship would remain a dream unless both powers evolve a just resolution of Sino-Indian border issue. Lt. Gen. E.A.Vas (Retd) suggested three approaches to solve border issue during 1982, firstly to solve it through a court of Arbitration whose award should be acceptable to both India and China. Secondly, to adopt status quo approach giving an edge to China in Aksai Chin in the west to make them accept the McMahon Line as boundary in the east. Chinese superiority lies in its military strength and thirdly, to adopt Real Estate approach allowing the uninhabited land to them in exchange of Kailash and Mansarover. It is not an economically viable area for India, though it is strategically important to China as it constitutes a natural buffer between Sinkiang and Tibet. Therefore Aksai Chin may be exchanged for Chaumbi Valley—the southern dagger of Tibet which adjoins Sikkim, Bengal and Bhutan.<sup>81</sup>

The establishment of Sino-Indian Association on August 11, 1982 meant that both the countries were committed to improve relations. On October 20, 1982, KC Pant led a delegation of this association to China and was received

by the Chinese Premier Zhao Zijang.<sup>82</sup> Zhao told a delegation of the Sino-Indian society that China and India were large Asian countries that could exert great impact on the world. The 1950s was a period of good cooperation, he said and “the two peoples miss that period”. He further stated that, “we will never forget the help they rendered to the Chinese people when we were in difficulty. We hope the seeds of friendship sown by them will blossom with beautiful flowers”. Meanwhile, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders received another delegation from the Indian Council of Social Science Research led by G. Parthasarthi. They also discussed the border problem and gave suggestions to resolve the border issue. All these facts show that both countries are moving towards normalization of relation. It marked the second time in as many days that a Chinese leader, had issued a strong call for better relations with India. On October 22, 1982, Mr. Deng Xiaoping told an Indian delegation that there was no mutual threat and the boundary question could be solved.<sup>83</sup>

Three months after the conclusion of the May border talks, China and Pakistan signed a protocol regarding opening the border pass of Khunjerab on the Karakoram highway to commercial traffic.<sup>84</sup> The pass connected Aksai Chin road built by China on the Indian territory in Ladakh according to Indian claims on the one hand and POK-Xingjian road [Sino-Pakistan Friendship Highway] on the other. India protested to China, and considered POK-Xingjian highway a threat to its security, for the highway gave Pakistan a stronger foothold in the territory claimed by India, and also an easy access to China should she wish to connive with Pakistan against India.

Another unpleasant incident was walked out by the Chinese athletes during the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi when a cultural trop from Arunachal Pradesh performed at the closing ceremony of the games. Xinhua in a review remarked that the “so-called Arunachal Pradesh” was territory occupied by India. The Indian move at Asian Games was made to assert India’s effective sovereignty in the disputed region, and is not acceptable to China. China asserted that the Lion and Peacock dance by Arunachal troupe “now

made the border dispute and international affair and runs counter to the Game's principles of strengthening friendship among Asian people".<sup>85</sup> India retaliated to such caustic comments by cancelling the visit of its delegation to China that was to take part in a function in memory of Kotnis.<sup>86</sup> However, a five-member All-China Women Federation delegation visited India on December 18, 1982, which improve the atmosphere "spoiled" by the Xinhua's commentary.<sup>87</sup>

### **The Third Round of Border Negotiation:**

Against this background, the third round of negotiations was held at Beijing from January 29 to February 2, 1983.<sup>88</sup> The Indian delegations to the talks was led by Mr. K.S. Bajpai, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs and former Indian Ambassador to China. The Chinese delegation was headed by Mr. Fu Hao Adviser to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs who also led his country's delegation to the second round of talks.<sup>89</sup> Delegations from both the sides discussed the entire range of bilateral relations between India and China, and paid special attention to the various aspects of boundary problem on which they had "earnest and frank" exchanges of views. According to Xinhua, Chinese news agency, "both sides were positive in their attitude in negotiations on the boundary question, and the air was friendly."<sup>90</sup> In spite of all these good efforts, no substantial progress was achieved because of differences in positions.<sup>91</sup> The familiar position of China offering a fair deal through its package and India rejecting it out of hand were made. Later on, the Ministry of state of External Affairs stated that, "at the official level talks both sides have been able to state their fundamental positions on the boundary question and to make an effort to deal with the differences between them, which remain wide. They have also been able to work out measures for cooperation in cultural and other fields."<sup>92</sup>

In this round, on the boundary question, an attempt was initiated by the two sides to evolve a mutually agreed set of principle to serve as guidelines for future discussion.<sup>93</sup> The two delegations had a serious exchange of opinions in order to seek common ground. The Chinese delegation put forward a draft containing points common to each country's approach to the boundary issue.

Both countries, the draft read, agreed on: Adherence to the five principles of peaceful co-existence; the desire for an early settlement through consultations in a spirit of friendship and equality; the need to consider the history, existing conditions and national sentiments of each country; and the maintenance of peace on the border before a settlement is reached. India termed the Chinese approach positive and constructive. India also put forward a draft that read: “China has constantly maintained that the two parties should arrive at a fair, reasonable and comprehensive settlement of their boundary issue through friendly consultations and in a spirit of mutual understanding”.

As for India’s approach to resolve border issue from sector to sector basis, a Chinese official stated, “it is in favour of a comprehensive settlement, but does not oppose separate discussions on the eastern, middle and western sector of the boundary if this may lead to an over all settlement.”<sup>94</sup> Though both sides adopted a positive attitude during the discussions, no result was achieved.

### **Problems in Negotiation of Sino-Indian border talks 1983:**

In this series of talks the problems that caused hindrances were almost the same as in the previous round of talks as –differences in positions, China-Pakistan defence pact and India-Pakistan emerging tensions. Additionally, some other problems were also there in this round. (i) Political state (condition) of Indian home affairs. The leaders were reluctant to raise any issue regarding the settlement of dispute. The euphoria of forth-coming Lok Sabha election diminished their interest regarding negotiation with China. Mrs. Gandhi was particularly disturbed by Beijing’s defence relationship with Pakistan. (ii) This association led to intensified India and Pakistan tensions. (iii) Economic competition between India and China focusing on foreign trade and competition for loans from international financial agencies manifested in coming years.<sup>95</sup>

**Prospects:** - In other domains, the bilateral exchange continued unhindered. A Chinese trade delegation led by Zheng Hongye participated in the first trade

and economic corporation conference in New Delhi from February 19-20, 1983. Chu Tunan, member of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, visited India in March at the invitation of Sino-Indian Association. In April M.S. Namboodripad, General Secretary of the CPI (M) visited China and was received by the top Chinese leaders including Deng Xiaoping. The visit of Namboodripad further affirmed that India no longer viewed China as a supporter of the insurgencies in India.<sup>96</sup> In June, Indira Gandhi met the Chinese Deputy Premier, Yao Li Yin, at the sixth UN Trade conference in Belgrade. Chinese Deputy Premier assured Mrs. Gandhi about Chinese Government's "positive attitude towards improvement of relations with India".<sup>97</sup> These developments were pointer to the fact that the border question should not be hindrance in developing relations in the other domains. The chief justice of India, Y.V. Chandrachud said in Beijing that India-China must come closer as they can together constitute a bastion against in justified aggression. It is very apparent that Mrs. Gandhi cannot make any concession to China on border at the expense of annoying the Indian rank and file (in the light of forthcoming elections). The first two rounds were procedural in nature. Since the third round of talks at Beijing, serious and substantial discussions started on the sensitive yet pivotal question of boundaries. Hence since February 1983, an enhancement of political speculation started occurring at both the centres.

Since then the twin parties have treaded on the path of meticulously cautious approaches. They hovered around the general principles to solve the boundary dispute in vague terms. Two crystal clear facts emerged that China stuck to its package plan as India harped on its sector to sector approach, which implied tackling the boundary in the Middle and the Eastern sector first, to be followed by the negotiations in the Western sector.<sup>98</sup>

Prior to the fourth round of talks in New Delhi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian, was quoted as saying that he did not visualise a "very quick solution" to the boundary dispute. He said: "One has to resolutely work for a solution of the Sino-Indian boundary dispute and strengthen friendship so that both people come closer to each other".<sup>99</sup> The Chinese Premier, Zhao

Ziyang, in his address to the National People's Congress, stated that 'the Sino-Indian boundary question left over from the past can without doubt be settled through consultations.' He further added: "even if it [boundary question] cannot be settled for the time being, it should not stand in the way of improving our relations".<sup>100</sup> India also shared a similar view. Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on August 4, 1983, External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao, while referring to the "wide" differences between the two sides in the last three rounds of negotiations on the boundary dispute, opposed the packaged deal of Deng Xiaoping.<sup>101</sup>

#### **The Fourth Round of Border talks:**

The fourth round of negotiation was held at New Delhi from October 24-30, 1983. The Indian delegation was headed by Mr. K.S. Bajpai, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs. His delegation includes: Mr. A P Venkataswaran, the then Indian Ambassador to China; Mr Prem Badhwar, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs; Mr. Ranjit Sethi who was heading the China desk at the South Block earlier and was ambassador to Malaysia; Mr. C.R. Garekhan who handles foreign affairs at the Prime Minister's office and Mr. Alan Nazreth, Secretary, Indian Council of Cultural Relations. Other members in the Indian delegation include: Mr. G.N. Rao, former ambassador to Mongolia and an old expert on China, and Mr. SN Rao, Director Policy Planning and officials from the Commerce Ministry and Department of Culture, and Science and Technology.

The Chinese delegation was led by Mr. Gong Dafie, Vice-Foreign Minister, his team include; Mr. Liu Shu Qing, Assistant Foreign Minister and Director, Asia Department; Mr. Chen Songlu, Deputy Director, Asia Department; Mr. Tu Guowei, Head of office of Sino-Indian Boundary Affairs, Asia Department; Mr. Mou Young Mao, Deputy Director, Foreign Economic Relations and Trade; Mr. Gao Zhengi, Deputy Head of Office of Sino-Indian Boundary Affairs; Mr. Zhou Gang, Division Chief, Asia Department; and Mr Guan Aimef, Deputy Division Chief Foreign Liaison Bureau, Ministry of culture.<sup>102</sup>

During the fourth round of talks both the sides agreed to consider rival approaches for resolving the longstanding dispute between the two countries. In the light of the third round of talks, India in turn came out with a set of six principles of its own for the purpose.

**The Working Principles:** The six working Principles for the conduct of negotiations of the boundary question were:

1. A solution must be found as early as possible;
2. It should be a just solution taking into account the legitimate interests of both sides;
3. Both sides should find a commonly agreed upon approach and basis for discussions;
4. The proposals advanced by either sides as constituting an approach to the problem, should be considered by the other;
5. It is necessary to consider steps to create a propitious atmosphere;
6. Efforts should be made to settle the border issue in each sector.<sup>103</sup>

India showed a definite intention to generate an atmosphere of cordiality, in order to thrash out solution to their respective problems.<sup>104</sup> Both the sides were serious in working out a solution is evident from the fact that they extended the talks by one day. The six-days round of talk centred its deliberations on the principles, on their validity, pros and cons of their applications, minor and major agreements or disagreements. The differences were left for the fifth round of talks to be held in Beijing in 1984. Unanimity was that the use of force in acquiring territory shall be avoided and all forthcoming discussions shall be based upon historical evidence, custom and tradition. Different connotations, formulations and meanings were suggested for explaining further the implications of the geographical features, watersheds, river valleys and mountain passes.<sup>105</sup>

A new element introduced in the fourth round of talks related to a general exchange of views on the international situation, which proved to be a pragmatic expression of views on the international situation, which resulted in

improving mutual understanding.<sup>106</sup> As the Ministry of External Affairs, Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao stated in Parliament: “On the boundary question, detailed discussions were held an attempt was made to evolve a mutually acceptable set of principles to serve as guidelines for future discussions. While some common ground was covered, differences on certain vital aspects remained which would be taken up in the next round of talks. On cooperation and exchanges in other aspects of bilateral relations, the ground was prepared for these contacts during 1984. The exchanges of views on the current world situation were a useful exercise resulting in a better understanding of each other’s perception of the international situation today.”<sup>107</sup>

Undoubtedly, links between the two nations were picking up showing a more accommodative approach towards each others point of view. But so far as the border issue was concerned, there was no progress. Since a commonality and reconciliation on them could not emerge presently, they were also postponed for the next round of talks. The basis parameters of the talks included:

- 1) Enlarged flexibility in their attitudes in general was the hallmark of these talks. An unprejudiced and thorough scrutiny of their agreed principles revealed that in China’s case it was reiteration of its package plan and in India’s case it was sector-to-sector approach.
- 2) Massive improvement in trade links and programme of further exchanges was mooted. They agreed to provide a favoured treatment on trade, normalisation process in fields of cultures, science and technology.
- 3) India produced a comprehensive documentary of the entire region, mounting tensions in the Eastern and Western blocks an ensuing entente and super power rivalries.
- 4) Both had a near unanimity over global economic situations.
- 5) The central issue, the boundary question shall not hinder the improvement of peripheral bilateral relations.
- 6) Agreed to work on the questions of assets and properties of each in the other country and have also agreed to consider other proposals in details.<sup>108</sup>

The New Delhi talks successfully bore the odium of “reasonable progress” towards greater understanding and reconciliation, over so far disagreed points throughout the talks, the congenial, cordial, bonhomie compact and friendly atmosphere, prevailed which was teeming with optimism with a base for further discussions. It left behind a note of encouragement, as the meet from the beginning to end, remained peaceful and fruitful. Enormous trust and goodwill was generated, which was an obvious hopeful sign.<sup>109</sup>

The perspectives and perceptions on regional and international scene remained poles apart. The talks should not substantially provide the solution of boundary tussle, though it loomed large on their heads and wanted preface in devising a rough framework, to be adopted in future. Extension of talks by a day speaks volumes of their mutual anxiety to narrow, if not close the gap.<sup>110</sup> So far as long there was no unanimity over the question as to who has annexed how much of whose property? Now that headway was available, the impasse was over and the solid ground was prepared for future discussions. After the close of talks, Xinhua quoted the Chinese delegation in Delhi as saying, “China will go on actually and with good faith seeking further improvement with India.” China has also said that it was not difficult to solve the Sino-Indian border issue, “given good faith, a realistic attitude, adherence to the five principles of peaceful co-existence and continued, patient and relenting efforts on both sides.”<sup>111</sup>

Fourth round of talks was “most specific” round in the series of talks so far held. This was because the two sides generated specific proposals towards a solution of the border problem.<sup>112</sup> A retrospective analysis of the condemnation of use of force theory implied negotiated settlement in future. It confirmed their firm resolve and conviction not to employ invectives or war. Their working propositions, principles and guidelines frame the mosaic upon which a future meaningful, negotiated settlement can be erected. Even if a decision on future modalities and their fruitful understanding constituted a great leap forward, the total solution remained a matter of time, involving serious speculation

in both the quarters. The approach of these “Asian Giants” in arriving at rapprochement in slow, nevertheless decisive and pregnant with hope.<sup>113</sup>

The exchange of visits continued after the talks were over. On January 1984, Mrs. Gandhi received a Chinese delegation from the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) led by Ma Hong, the director of the Academy. Mrs. Gandhi told the delegates that she was happy about the improvement in Sino-Indian relation, and hoped that these would continue to grow. On February 7, Rajiv Gandhi, General Secretary of the Congress (I), received a delegation of China Youth Federation led by Hu Jintao, present President of China and General Secretary of the CCP. Hu and his entourage stayed in India for 11 days. On February 20, Mrs. Gandhi received yet another delegation from China that was led by Huang Hua, Deputy of China’s NPC Standing Committee. Huang, the former Foreign Minister of China, was also received by Vice President, J. Hidayatullah and Lok Sabha speaker Balram Jakhar. Trade and economic relations were also furthered.

On August 15, 1984, Abid Hussain, Secretary of Commerce, visited China and signed a trade agreement with Lu Xuejian, China’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade. Both countries agreed to accord most favoured nation treatment to either side. The agreement was unprecedented in the history of India and China after 30 years. The 1954 agreement was somewhat different as it primarily concentrated on Indo–Tibetan trade. Commenting on the agreement the Financial Express wrote on August 18, 1984 that the conclusion of the trade agreement between India and China reflected the “political maturity” of both sides, especially when the border problem remained unresolved and differences existed on many global and regional problems.<sup>114</sup>

All these facts show positive attitude of both sides. But on the other hand a few months before the fifth round of negotiations Chinese leaders told visiting West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in May 1984 that there was no immediate possibility of a settlement of the border dispute.<sup>115</sup> Against this background China published some books that depicted various parts of Indian territory as Chinese. The Encyclopaedia of Tibetan History, Red Annals,

China's Historical Links—these books have been officially approved and published by the highest authorities—political consultative committee, shows many parts of India, Nepal, Bhutan all of Mongolia, the former Soviet Union, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam as China's territories.<sup>116</sup>

### **Preparatory Work:**

The Indian Government issued, a categorical statement, teeming with conciliatory overtones, which endeavoured to convey to the Chinese in broad terms, India's intention to keep the solution of boundary dispute crucial and central to the dialogue. The consensus on pertinent and plausible settlement of boundary was yet to evolve.

In almost all political circles and diplomatic channels, there has been a lurking suspicion about the significance and validity of the fourth dialogue in making any "headway". It has been chiefly because of passivity, rigidity and dogmatic outlooks which prevailed during the earlier talks. Larger time was consumed by other areas of concern and interest and boundary dispute remained at the periphery that is why the talks remained unproductive. In the fourth round also concrete solution did not emerge, only their divergent attitudes were analysed in greater details. The Chinese were seeking a comprehensive solution where as India started from the eastern and then moved to the solution in the middle and western sectors.<sup>117</sup>

### **Problems:**

Fourth round of talks was "most specific" round in the series of talks so far held. But the border problem remained unresolved and differences existed on many global and regional problems. Large time was consumed by other areas of concern and interest and boundary dispute remained at the peripheries, was one of the reason of not having concrete solution. Secondly, the two sides differed on how far geographical features should be taken into account in negotiation on the boundary question. Available information suggests that Indian side tried to use the words "salient geographical feature" while the Chinese were opposed to the prefix "salient". Neither side was being dull

witted or indulging in sophistry. The probability was that by insisting on the word 'salient' the Indians were trying to rub the watershed principle for determining the boundary along the Himalayan slopes and the Chinese were taking care to prevent the water-shed principle from creeping in. They could not go over a large number of general principles because more differences would have been thrown up and apparently the two sides felt that these could not be resolved in this round. Thirdly, lack of political will i.e. leaders of both countries were not ready to make major moves to resolve the boundary question in near future because of their countries internal interests, such as China was busy with its modernisation plan and mending fence with Soviet Union. On the other hand India's Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi was busy, planning for next Parliamentary election and was not ready to face opposition attack by offering territorial concession to the Chinese to seek a settlement in an election year.<sup>118</sup> Fourthly, improved Sino-Soviet relations posed a threat to Sino-Indian smooth sailing.

#### **The Fifth Round of Border Talks:**

The fifth round of border talks was held in Beijing from September 17-22, 1984.<sup>119</sup> The Chinese delegation was headed by Gong Dafei, adviser to the Foreign Ministry and the Indian delegation by Secretary of External Affairs Ministry, K. Natwar Singh. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself chaired a meeting to finalise the brief for Mr. K. Natwar Singh's visit to China.<sup>120</sup> The areas covered were trade, economic cooperation cultural and scientific ties and the border issue. Four sub-groups emerged: especially to deal with the boundary question, cultural cooperation, scientific and technical exchanges and question of property and assets. The boundary question, Xinhau said was to be "central". This sub-group was headed by Vice-Minister Liu Shu Qing of China and Joint Secretary of East Asia, P.K.Budhwar.<sup>121</sup>

Discussions were held in a "frank, friendly and cordial atmosphere", and made some progress "so as to enable substantive discussions on the boundary question leading to an early and just settlement".<sup>122</sup> It was decided at the meeting that "substantive" negotiations of the boundary question would be

conducted in the next round of talks.<sup>123</sup> In this round it was reported that differences had been narrowed.<sup>124</sup> What exactly this amounted to was not clear. There was a discernible attempt to find words and phrases more acceptable to both. Chinese Vice-Premier, Wan Li expressed his hope that before agreement was reached on the boundary question, China and India would continue to ensure the tranquillity and peace on the border of the two countries. He said the fifth round of talks progressed quite well and the two sides had reached agreement on several issues. It did not matter that there were still some differences existing between the two countries, he said, adding that they could be resolved later.<sup>125</sup>

Once again there was no solution and the dead lock over the dispute persisted.<sup>126</sup> This is evident from the fact that on September 23, 1984, Defence Minister SB. Chavan stated, that “India would make no concessions on Aksai Chin or the other Indian territories occupied by China in 1962. Aksai Chin has always been a part of Jammu and Kashmir and there is no possibility of making any concessions on that front during the border talks.”<sup>127</sup>

On account of this extended stalemate over the border negotiations, Mrs. Gandhi sensed the need for a political push to the talks. However, the border problem continued to constitute a serious obstacle in full development of Sino-Indian relations,<sup>128</sup> and the problem was how to remove it at their earliest. The Chinese packages deal envisaged freezing the status quo on the Sino-Indian border. India expressed its inability to accept it as it would mean allowing China to occupy 14, 000 sq. miles of Indian territory. India insisted on sector by sector approach to settle matter, in sector, where no differences existed and to open comprehensive dialogue in areas, where differences existed. After these talks also no “substantive aspects” of solution to boundary dispute appeared in sight.<sup>129</sup>

Later, the Minister of state for External Affairs, Khurshid Alam Khan informed the Parliament that on the boundary question, both sides had directed their efforts at evolving a set of common principles that could serve as a basis for reaching an understanding on a final settlement. Differences on certain

aspects had been narrowed down and both sides had agreed to commence substantive discussions on the boundary question during the next round of official level talks.<sup>130</sup>

On the other fronts, diplomatic and cultural exchange continued as usual. On October 1, 1984 on the occasion of 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of People's Republic of China, Giani Zail Singh, the Indian President and Mrs. Gandhi separately congratulated Chinese President, Li Xiannian. Sino-Indian friendship association held a grand reception in New Delhi.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang in a message to his Indian counterpart said, that "India was one of the first countries to established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. I am pleased to note that in recent years marked progress has been made in relations between our two countries, thanks to our joint efforts".<sup>132</sup>

On the occasion of 115<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Chinese Association for goodwill, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute of South Asian studies of Peking University held a ground commemoration meeting on September 27 and paid tribute to the great Indian freedom fighter and apostle of peace.<sup>133</sup>

The assassination of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984 "shocked" China.<sup>134</sup> The Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang paid tribute to Mrs. Gandhi for her efforts to improve Sino-Indian relations. He further stated: "We hope that the two sides will make efforts to keep this momentum going and try to restore the friendly relationship to the level of the 1950s".<sup>135</sup> Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi received Vice-Premier, Ya Yilin on November 4 and reiterated that his Government would continue to follow past policies. He also accepted Zhao Ziyang's invitation to visit China.<sup>136</sup>

Due to efforts from both sides, the process of normalisation of Sino-Indian relations was not halted by a change of India's political leadership. After Rajiv Gandhi's landslide victory in the Lok Sabha elections at the end of December 1984, Beijing again expressed its intention of improving

relations with India. In his inaugural ceremony held on December 31, 1984 Rajiv Gandhi spoke in general terms about maintaining friendly relations with all the neighbouring countries but with special references to China. In a statement made on January 15, 1985, Rajiv expressed satisfaction with the achievement made with regard to the 22 year long dispute over the boundary but he realised that he had to go a long way before the settlement was effected. The Chinese envoy Yao Hin was a little more optimistic. On January 17, 1985 in a public address Yao extolled the improvement in relations between the two countries and assured that there was no conflict on major issues between the two sides except for some minor problems that had yet to be solved.<sup>137</sup> In his annual address to the Parliament on January 17, 1985, the President stated: "Our relations with China have shown improvement. We shall preserve in seeking solution to the boundary question".<sup>138</sup>

As regards the pending issues between India and China, Rajiv Gandhi wrote: "We sincerely hope that with our common efforts, we will be able to resolve the unsettled issues on the basis of five principles of peaceful co-existence and restore and strengthen the historic relationship that existed between our two countries".<sup>139</sup> In June 1985, China proposed that both sides should reciprocally reopen consulates in Lhasa, Shanghai, Bombay and Calcutta, which had been closed since 1961 and resume the long suspended Sino-Indian border trade.<sup>140</sup>

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was on his part, also keenly interested in speeding up the process of normalisation of ties with China. His first meeting with the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang was in New York in October, 1985 where both had gone to participate in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of the United Nations.<sup>141</sup> Both agreed to resolve the border problem. Zhao stated that the border question was a legacy of history, but Mr. Gandhi interjected by stating that it was a key point in their relationship. Both the Premiers agreed that there was need to push forward the efforts to find a solution and to promote friendship between the two countries. Zhao reiterated his country's invitation to Rajiv Gandhi to visit China. Premier Gandhi welcomed the

suggestion but stated that such a meeting could be fruitful only if solid preparatory work preceded it.<sup>142</sup> The political trends in mid-eighties suggested that there was a desire among the leaders of the two countries to improve their relations.

### **Problems:**

Indian domestic politics is considered to be one of the problem in negotiated settlement of Sino-Indian border talks is evident from the fact, that the Chinese position had softened somewhat and according to an Indian official closely connected with the talks, the Chinese appeared amenable to settling the dispute along the McMahon Line in the eastern sector with minor Indian concessions. They also wanted certain pieces of Indian territory in the Aksai Chin area led to an abandonment of the proposal. Secondly, Mrs. Gandhi was concerned about the forthcoming election in 1985 and did not wish to convey the appearance of Indian weakness. Mrs. Gandhi's assassination created a political turmoil in government, consequently decision making authorities appeared unwilling to take any major decision to resolve the border issues.<sup>143</sup> Lastly, the lack of proper preparatory work blocked the progress of normalisation of relations.

### **The Sixth Round of Border talks:**

The sixth round of border talks was held in New Delhi from November 4 –11, 1985. Liu Xiaqing, Deputy Foreign Minister of China led the Chinese delegation<sup>144</sup> and Indian delegation headed by A.P. Venkateswaran. The two delegation were divided into four sub-group after the plenary sessions in order to deal separately with the border question, cultural, scientific and technological cooperation and, finally, the issues relating to properties and assets taken over after the 1962 war.<sup>145</sup> The main sub-group dealt with the border dispute. During this round, both sides adopted a sector by sector approach and explained their respective positions on the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian boundary.<sup>146</sup> The two countries stated their views on the substantive issues relating to the eastern sector of the disputed border and

decided to discuss in detail, those related to the middle and western sectors in the next round. Further, the Chinese also put forward their long-standing claim that the traditional boundary line to the east ran well south of the McMahon Line that is, the Himalayan crest. Thus, far from the expected breakthrough, China introduced a new element by demanding territorial concessions by India in the eastern sector.<sup>147</sup> The Chinese sources stated: “Both sides had substantive discussion on the boundary and elaborated their respective position on the issue. They agreed that the discussions were useful and conducive to seeking a solution to the boundary”.<sup>148</sup> The two sides removed an irritant and bilateral relations by resolving the issue of Indian embassy’s properly in Beijing seized by the Chinese in 1967. The issue of compensation was also sorted out.<sup>149</sup>

In December 1985 the External Affairs Minister stated in the Rajya Sabha that the resolution of the border problem was a prerequisite for a complete normalisation of relations. In 1986, relations with China deteriorated. There were allegations of Chinese involvements in Pakistan’s nuclear program, and the Annual Report of the Indian Defence Ministry, which had a new section on national security, included a discussion of the security threat from the Peoples Republic of China.<sup>150</sup> Political and military signals coming from China indicated that the Chinese governments claim on the eastern sector, namely areas in Arunachal Pradesh, was not a dead issue.<sup>151</sup>

China was interested to strike deal with India as her main objective was to “break the Indo-Soviet encirclement”.<sup>152</sup> A detailed commentary on May 8, 1986 on Sino-Indian border issue blamed the policies of British colonial regime in India, by creating the so called McMahon Line. The same policy was further adopted after Independence. China blamed India for having occupied the middle sector area during 1953-54. It reiterated that 2,000 km. long boundary has never been formally delimited and “..... a traditional customary boundary respected by the two peoples had long taken shape on the basis of the extent of each side’s jurisdiction ..... ”.<sup>153</sup> Although no breakthrough was achieved during sixth round, both sides however, maintained that the talks were frank and candid.

At one point of time, the Chinese Government was keen to receive a high ranking Indian leader, preferably the Prime Minister. India on the other hand, thought of sending its Minister of External Affairs, Bali Ram Bhagat to Beijing. But this did not take place because India, it was said, wanted to end the current series of talks by completing the sector wise exchange of views before starting political level discussions on a comprehensive settlement of the border question.<sup>154</sup>

Before the seventh round of negotiations, in June 1986, about 40 Chinese, including some in uniform, had intruded 6 to 7 kilometres into the Kameng division of Arunachal Pradesh (Sumdorong Chu). Although accusations from both sides to intrusions into each other's territories were not new, this time the Chinese stayed back.<sup>155</sup> Gradually, their number increased to about 200.<sup>156</sup> In the same month, the leaders of the Chinese delegation, Vice Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing, in an interview with Indian correspondents, raised for the first time the issue of the eastern sector being "the biggest dispute and key to an over all solution" to the border question. He termed Chou En-Lai's 1960 offer as "a general idea" rather than "any specific proposal". He hinted that even after the "unfortunate war of 1962 which resolved the dispute to some degree", India was still "in occupation of" the Chushul area. Giving vent to his feelings, he insisted that India should make "unilateral concessions." To elaborate, he contended: if the dispute in the eastern sector is not resolved, how can India ask for concessions in the western sector? It is unreasonable to say that the whole dispute should be resolved according to history and the customary and traditional boundary. That is not China's position. If India makes some readjustment and concessions in the eastern sector, then we could also make corresponding adjustments and concessions in the western sector ..... [However], if India finds doing this difficult, then the border question can be left aside for the time being and we could develop relations in other fields.<sup>157</sup>

The Foreign Minister B.R. Bhagat explained to the Parliament, the details of discussion, which took place at sixth round of official talks. He told

that both sides clarified their respective position on eastern sector of the boundary. He again told that both sides agreed to continue discussions on the border issue to reach on early solution covering all dimensions of the border problem.<sup>158</sup>

Shortly, before the seventh round of talks there was news about Chinese intrusion in Arunachal Pradesh. In consonance with this on July 18, 1986, Minister of External Affairs P.V. Shiv Shankar informed the Parliament that Indian government strongly opposed Chinese response that it was a disputed area; the Government stressed that Sumdorong Chu valley was well within Indian territory. Ultimately the Chinese government agreed to discuss the matter intensively in forthcoming seventh round of talks.<sup>159</sup>

#### **Progress in other areas:**

The sub-group on science and technology decided to exchange delegations in computer, industry, agriculture, education plasma, physics, laser technology and biotechnology. Some progress was made in the field of cultural exchanges as the two sides decided to hold exhibitions on contemporary art in New Delhi and Beijing. It was also agreed organise a joint seminar in Beijing on socio-economic planning in India and China.<sup>160</sup> Another development of the post Indira Gandhi Sino-Indian contacts was China's willingness to establish relations with other political parties of India besides the communist parties.<sup>161</sup>

#### **Hindrances in Negotiated Settlement of Sino-Indian border talks:**

There were many reasons, which causes obstacle in Sino-Indian border negotiation. Some of them are-

1. China introduced a new element by demanding territorial concessions by India in the eastern sector.
2. The Chinese put forward their long-standing claim that the traditional boundary line to the east ran well south of the McMahon Line.
3. Chinese involvement in Pakistan's nuclear program.
4. Security threat from the People's Republic of China.

5. The statement of the Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister and leader of the delegation to the border talks i.e. lack of political will.
6. Incursions in an area known as Sumdorong Chu in Arunachal Pradesh, an area of east-west mountain ranges that forms the trijunction of India, Bhutan and China.
7. China was interested to strike deal with India as her main objective was to break the Indo-Soviet encirclement.<sup>162</sup>

### **The Sumdorong Chu Crisis:**

Sumdorong Chu [Wangdong for China] is in Thagla Ridge in the eastern sector of Sino-Indian border. It may be recalled that the 1962 border war with China started off from the same area. Adhering to the watershed principle, India considers this area as Indian territory. China does not accept the McMahon Line and even if it does, since Sumdorong Chu falls north of McMahon Line, it is considered by China as Chinese territory. It accuses India of taking the opportunity of China's unilateral withdrawal north of McMahon Line and occupying the areas claimed by India. In view of the Indian ground action, asserts China resumed patrolling in this area in 1986. According to Sawhney, in 1984, Intelligence Bureau of India without informing the army set up a post in Sumdorong Chu area. The Chinese were continuously monitoring the routine of this small Indian detachment since then. It is still unknown that why did the Chinese act only in 1986 after a gap of two years? In mid June 1986, the Indian detachment returned back from Nyamjang Chu after collecting their salaries and ration, they found their post taken over by the people's liberation army with helicopter support. India at once lodged a protest and openly condemned the Chinese action on July 15, 1986. China clarified its position by saying that the People Liberation Army (PLA) was in its own territory; it was India that had violated and crossed over the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

On finding Chinese troops south of the Thagla Bumla line, the Indian army reacted by sending a task force to stop any further Chinese intrusion.<sup>163</sup> General Krishnaswamy Sunderjee, the Army Chief organised operation

chequer board (October 1986–mid March 1987) on the China border under which more than ten army divisions and the air force were involved. The troops fanned out all along the border and took positions. The Chinese reacted by taking positions in dangerous proximity to the Indians. Further China augmented its military presence in eastern Tibet. Almost all the ingredients of a major showdown were fast assembling. In fact, speculation about a second border war between India and China became common place and quite alarming.<sup>164</sup>

Though precise details about operation checkerboard remain unavailable, some observers contend that its significance lay well beyond an attempt to test the responses of both the super powers in the event of a Sino-Indian border conflict. It may also have been an attempt to test the continuing vitality of the Indo-Soviet relationship in the wake of Mikhail Gorbachev's July 1986 Vladivostok speech in which he had attached greater significance to Soviet relations with China and Japan than with India.<sup>165</sup>

Sumdorong Chu episode was a potentially dangerous situation which touched off a border build up by both sides but was controlled by diplomatic action.<sup>166</sup> Perhaps on account of this the Government seemed anxious to play down the Chinese intrusion into Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>167</sup> Indian Defence Minister of state, Arun Singh and General Sunderjee told a press conference in early 1987 that in case of crisis at border, 'the Indian forces will not fight with their hands tied' an indication to the Indian nuclear capability against any Chinese nuclear strike. It was a dangerous situation as the Indian army was heavily engaged in Siachin against Pakistan, and India had also committed considerable forces for operation 'Pawan' in Sri Lanka. The Sumdorong Chu incident however, did not escalate into war; neither did it stall the talks on border.

### **The Seventh Round of Border Talks:**

The seventh round of border talks was held in Beijing from July 21-23, 1986 during the heightening of the Sumdorong Chu incident. Indian Foreign

Secretary, A. P. Venkateswarn represented the Indian side and Liu Shuqing the Chinese. While receiving the Indian delegates, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian told them that the boundary problem was left over by the history, the atmosphere in which previous rounds of talks were held was very good, and however, it was conducive during the seventh round. We obviously were referring to the Sumdorong Chu crises. Venkteswaram, on the other hand pointed out that there has been some true and some untrue reporting in the Indian newspaper. The resolution of Sino-Indian boundary problem is the corner stone of the friendship that both countries desire to build. The Indian representative also said that he was looking forward for carrying this new round of talks in a constructive atmosphere.<sup>168</sup> Discussions held in a “friendly and frank” manner covered cultural, scientific and technological cooperation and international issues of mutual concern.<sup>169</sup> According to available information, the location of the area in dispute was discussed intensively, but without any resolution of the problem.<sup>170</sup> India’s deep concern over the Chinese intrusion in Sumdorong Chu Valley area was conveyed to the Chinese side during the talks. India stressed that the Chinese side should do nothing to aggravate matters and disturb the status quo.<sup>171</sup>

External Affairs Minister P. Shiv Shankar stated in Parliament that when the Indian delegation asked the Chinese to spell out precisely the alignment of the so-called Lines of Actual Control (LAC) in the eastern sector as they saw it, they declined to give the coordinate of this line.<sup>172</sup> Later, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi underlined the difficulties in negotiation process. He explained that some parts of the border were in dispute. “We feel that the line is at one point, China feels it is at another point. It really needs to be sorted out across the table and it is time that we sit down and do it,” he stated.<sup>173</sup> In another instance, he pointed out the “basic differences ..... in the attitudes” of both sides: India felt that the McMahon Line is referred to the geographical features. The Chinese feel that the longitude was more important”.<sup>174</sup> The interpretation of the LAC, if not the border itself, has thus become vague. This is further complicated by the Chinese argument that the LAC itself has been extended by the ‘marching’ Indian forces into the Chinese territory. Reflecting the official

Chinese position, a Chinese news agency argued: Although this actual line of control on the eastern part of the Sino-Indian border is unreasonable, China will respect it until the Sino-Indian border issue is settled at the talks...The problem is that the India's, taking advantage of the occasions when China has suspended its patrols, marched beyond the actual line of control in an attempt to nibble further at Chinese territory and to create more disputed territory. Regarding the problem of intruding Indian aircraft and military personnel, China has always shown restraint and repeatedly advised India not to do this. However, Indian activities across the line are increasing. What is even more intolerable is that the Indians refer to whatever part of Chinese territory they intend to annex as Indian territory. Naturally, China cannot accept this with folded arms. By doing all, the Indians have disrupted the peace on the border and made it difficult for the two countries to improve their relations and settle the boundary issue through negotiations.<sup>175</sup> There was differences of opinion on both sides.

According to KR. Narayanan, the Minister of state of External Affairs, substantive discussions were continued on the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian boundary, at the seventh round of official level talks, thereafter discussions commenced on the western sector. The Chinese side reiterated that the eastern sector was the area of 'largest dispute'. In response, the Indian side clearly enunciated its well-known stand that the Sino-Indian boundary in the eastern sector is the traditional customary line, which has received the additional sanction of treaty and administrative jurisdiction.<sup>176</sup>

Meanwhile, in December 1986, the Indian Parliament approved a bill that conferred full statehood to Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>177</sup> The Chinese government opposed this move and accused India of deliberately creating obstacles.<sup>178</sup> India, on its part, accused China of interfering in India's internal affairs and reiterated Indian sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.

Irrespective of the 1986-87 border crises in eastern sector, India and China continued to talk, which was a positive development. To push forward process of normalisation, India's Minister of External Affairs, N D Tiwari

stated in Lok Sabha that it was necessary for both sides to find a solution to the problems in a manner that ensures the maintenance of peace and tranquillity all along the boundary.<sup>179</sup>

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi stated on March 3, 1987 in Parliament that there has been tension on our border with China. We want a peaceful settlement of the border issue. It will need wisdom, statesmanship and firmness. Firmness is included in wisdom...It is this perspective that should guide our two countries in seeking a solution to the problem.<sup>180</sup>

Thus Rajiv Gandhi tried to introduce a new approach in India's policy of improving relations with China. Rajiv Gandhi's new approach to China was part of the general trend of transition in world politics from hostility and confrontation to détente and dialogue. With a thaw in Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviet Leader Gorbachev, who initiated Perestroika and Glasnost in Soviet Union; emphasised China's role in Asian and World Affairs and encouraged India's efforts to improve Sino-Indian relations.<sup>181</sup> The cumulative effect of the change in the international and regional climate on India-China relations was distinctly positive.

**Progress:** - On the other hand fruitful discussions on cultural, scientific and technological exchanges as well as on other issues of international mutual concern were held.<sup>182</sup> India and China signed in Beijing on May 27, 1987 the second Trade Protocol. The two sides expressed satisfaction at the growth of trade between the two countries since the signing of their first trade protocol in November 1985 and noted the potential for further growth on a balanced basis.<sup>183</sup> Desire for a peaceful settlement of the border issue, domestic political and economic changes in both the countries and relaxation in the tense international situation contribute greatly to understand each other.

### **Problems in Negotiation:**

The period between the seventh round of talks in July 1986 and the eight round in November 1987 appears to have been an important learning exercise for both sides. Increased border patrolling in the summer of 1986 had brought

Chinese and Indian troops into close and more frequent contact charge and countercharge raised tension to a pitch so high that the Chinese used U.S. Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger- during his visit to the subcontinent to pass on a message to New Delhi's leaders that Beijing would have to "teach India a lesson" if it did not stop 'nibbling' at Chinese territory.<sup>184</sup>

1. The Indian decision in December 1986 to raise Arunachal Pradesh, which was disputed territory, to the level of a state further increased Chinese irritation.<sup>185</sup>
2. Difference of opinion regarding the line of actual control.
3. Launch of operation checkerboard in the spring of 1987, along the Sino-India border raised tension.

### **The Eighth Round of Talks:**

The eighth round of border talks between India and China was held as scheduled from November 15 – 17, 1987 in New Delhi. K P S Menon, Foreign Secretary of India led the Indian side, while Liu Shuqing headed the Chinese delegation. During this round of talks, India no longer pressed for the quick resolution of boundary issue. This was perhaps a policy change under Rajiv Gandhi. Indira Gandhi has attached the resolution of boundary issue to the development of relations in other domains. Rajiv Government now deviated from this position and emphasised that the improvement and strengthening of relations in other spheres such as trade, commerce, science, technology and culture should not be held hostage to the border issue. The Chinese side reiterated its earlier position that India must do some readjustments in the eastern sector for an overall resolution of the boundary issue.<sup>186</sup>

The Indian delegation wanted the western sector to be included in the discussion.<sup>187</sup> For the first time since the 1962 war, the two sides officially exchanged views on international developments, including South Asia. As regards the boundary dispute, the Chinese side proposed for the creation of a demilitarised zone in the eastern sector by mutual withdrawal of troops, and the Indian delegation reportedly expressed its reservations on the proposal given the recent Sumdorong Chu incident.<sup>188</sup> Finally, it was agreed that both

countries would maintain peace all along the border, not just in the eastern sector alone.<sup>189</sup> Significantly, they also decided to set up a Working Group to go deeper into the boundary issue.<sup>190</sup> The issue of involving political leaders in negotiations was also pondered over.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, China expressed its unhappiness over the delay on the part of India in agreeing to its disengagement proposal. The Chinese ambassador, Tu Guowei argued: Since China's disengagement proposal has not yet been responded in real actions by the Indian side, the border situation today is not so stable, and is even marked with certain hidden dangers ... We therefore should not neglect the gravity and urgency of this reality. The settlement of the boundary issue does not require political wisdom and statesmanship from both sides. Meanwhile, peace and tranquillity must be maintained... If tension along the border can be defused and the border problem is finally solved in a peaceful and reasonable manner, we shall be in a position to focus our attention on more important issues bilaterally and internationally.<sup>192</sup>

Here in lies China's principal position on the boundary dispute and, in the years to come, this would be one of the fundamental aspects of the Chinese's attitude towards the issue.<sup>193</sup> Talks were held in a positive cordial and friendly atmosphere. No breakthrough was expected as a result of this round of talks but the stage was set for the threads being picked up at the political level.<sup>194</sup> At the conclusion of talks, Rajiv Gandhi met the Chinese delegates and expressed his desire for further improvement of bilateral relations. The scale of diplomatic and other exchanges in the year 1987 indicated that there was a genuine desire for the improvement of bilateral relations.

By 1988, Rajiv Gandhi enunciated a new approach in India's policy towards China and replying to the debate in the Lok Sabha, he stated on April 20, that "with China we have been endeavouring to improve our relations. We are building a climate of trust, looking for a new and productive phase in our relationships. We recognise that the process of normalisation is complex. The border question needs peaceful negotiations. It needs mutually acceptable

outcomes and we need to keep in mind the national sentiments in both countries. The maintenance of peace and tranquillity on our borders becomes vital while we talk of long term settlement we are strengthening cooperation in many fields with China. We are glad that the efforts to normalise have been welcomed by all sections of the House. We have accepted in principle that I should visit China on their invitation.”<sup>195</sup>

The Chinese leadership responded with enthusiasm by early 1988 to the proposal for a visit by the Indian Prime Minister. Talking to the Indian External Affairs, P.V. Narasimha Rao in New York on October 4, 1988, his Chinese counterpart, Wu Xueqian told him that Rajiv Gandhi’s visit would prove to be a turning point in the relations between the two countries.<sup>196</sup>

Later, the Minister of External Affairs, P.V. Narasimha Rao stated in the Parliament in November 1988: “The Dialogue is an ongoing one pending a lasting peaceful and mutually acceptable solution of the boundary question, it has been agreed that peace and tranquillity should be maintained all along the border. Further, talks will be held when the Prime Minister visit China”.<sup>197</sup>

### **Rajiv Gandhi’s China Visit:**

Rajiv Gandhi’s five-day visit to China from December 19-24, 1988 was one of the main event in the history of Sino-Indian relations but also a landmark in the history of Asia and international relations, for it led a political breakthrough between India and China.<sup>198</sup> The state visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China was a definite step towards speeding up the sluggish process of normalisation and this was the first visit to China by an Indian Prime Minister in 34 years after Nehru’s 1954 visit. Gandhi set the tone by declaring that, “it is now time to look to the future, I have come to renew an old friendship.”<sup>199</sup> Deng Xiaoping, the top Chinese leader said that “China and India should forget the unpleasant past and set their eyes on the future”.<sup>200</sup>

Premier Li Peng was Rajiv Gandhi’s major interlocutor during the visit, and their discussions focussed on the substantive issue of the border, Tibet, bilateral relations and international situation. Premier Li accepted Gandhi’s

invitation to pay a return visit to India. During the visit the two sides had “in-depth discussions” on the Sino-Indian boundary question and agreed to settle it through peaceful and friendly consultations. In his banquet speech, the Chinese Premier, Li Peng dealt with the boundary question by restarting the known Chinese position of seeking “a fair and reasonable settlement in a spirit of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation.”<sup>201</sup>

In reply, the Indian Prime Minister observed that the boundary question needed an enduring solution based on an understanding of each other’s point of view which would be in their mutual interest and to the benefit of both peoples. During first two days of Rajiv Gandhi’s visit, it appeared that the visit would end up, merely in symbolism, for both sides were exchanging diplomatic pleasantries and merely reiterating their earlier positions. On December 21, 1988 Indian Prime Minister had a 90 minutes meeting with 84 years old Deng Xiaoping. Deng pointed to the days of “Sino-Indian brotherhood” during the 1950s and said let us forget the past and do everything with an eye on the future.<sup>202</sup> On December 22, India and China decided to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on the boundary issue. The two sides also agreed to develop relations in other fields and to set up a joint group on economic relations and trade, as well as science and technology. The two countries signed three accords on cultural scientific and technological cooperation as well as civil aviation.<sup>203</sup>

But the real gains of Rajiv Gandhi’s visit were perhaps more in the intangible category. The long handshake with Deng reflected the intangible new spirit that Rajiv and Deng were trying to infuse into the Sino-Indian relationship. As a result, there was a major push forward in the process of Sino-Indian normalisation. As Deng told Gandhi that “starting from his visit, China and India will restore friendship between the two countries, people and leaders.”<sup>204</sup> Rajiv Gandhi himself assessed his visit as a turning point in mutual relations. He admitted that differences still remained but India would like to broaden area of common interests.

In his annual address to the Parliament February 21, 1989 the President stated that, “with the Prime Minister’s recent visit to China, we have embarked on a new and positive place in our relations with that country. The cordial and constructive discussion held with Chinese leaders has opened the way for a stable, peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries. This is a development of great significance for regional and world peace as India and China, together, represent a third of humanity.”<sup>205</sup>

From the available sources it can be concluded that the period of 1980s proved to be the turning point in the history of Sino-Indian relations because from that year onward the process of normalisation had gathered momentum. During the late cold war period between June 1981 and November 1987, eight rounds of official level talks were held to resolve the border issue alternatively in Beijing and New Delhi at Vice-Minister level. But no breakthrough was made. Among these five were held during Indira Gandhi’s regime and three during Rajiv Gandhi’s Premiership.

The first four border talks were concerned with “basic principles” and the last four the “situation on the ground”. The fourth round was the most significant of the eight, in that the Chinese dropped their insistence on all encompassing proposal and substituted a sector-by-sector approach, and both agreed to the improvement of relations in other areas. The Chinese foreign policy since the 1980s placed an accent on a stable external environment for its internal economic reforms process. India also embarked on a similar concern for internal viability.

There could be no doubt that a qualitatively different step has been taken towards the resolution of the border problem. But it is well known fact that the border problem between India and China was so complex and longstanding it was not possible to solve the problem in just one or two meetings. Many initiatives had been taken from time to time from 1962 onward to resolve the border dispute example opening of Hindu pilgrimage sites in Tibet Mansarovar and Kailash, maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the border.

On the other hand due to certain problems both sides could not reach at the proper solution. Some of the major problem that come in the way of resolving the border problems are- conferral of full statehood to Arunachal Pradesh, Sumdorong Chu valley incident, lack of political will, differences of opinion on both sides, domestic problem lack of proper preparatory work, Chinese involvement in Pakistan's nuclear program, launch of operation checkerboard in the spring of 1987 along the border etc. Apart from the border talks, fruitful discussion on cultural, scientific, technological, educational, trade etc were held. There was the need to change the mindset and keep patience on both sides. In the end of 1980s, P.M. Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China proved to be the landmark in the history of Asia and international relations which led to a political breakthrough between India and China. His visit was pragmatic step towards speeding up the sluggish process of normalisation.

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