



Hindi-Chini bhai-behen

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Most China's watchers agree that the recent visit of Congress president Sonia Gandhi to Beijing was a milestone in Sino-Indian relations. Ms Gandhi said she was "amazed and astounded at the progress made by the people of China and its leadership". Welcoming her, Mr Wang Jiarui, China's Minister of the International Department, was effusive:

"Your visit has captured the attention of the whole world

Whether true or not, no one can deny that the self-nominated Chinese leadership rolled out the red carpet for Ms Gandhi. She was the first leader to meet President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao after their terms were renewed by the Communist Party of China.

In her address to the School of Public Policy and Management of Tsinghua University, organised by the CPC, Ms Gandhi spoke of pragmatism and mutual self-interest as a sound basis for future relations. She praised China which has "shown the world how much could be achieved with pragmatism, clarity of vision and determination of effort". Will this visit mark the beginning of a new honeymoon? Only the future will tell us.

One can, however, hope that her partners in the ruling coalition listened to her speech; she told the Communist students: "I believe we have much to learn from the way that you have approached economic reforms and liberalisation." Will the Indian comrades get the message? We are not sure.

Ms Gandhi's visit followed the tripartite talks between the Foreign Ministers of India, China and Russia in China. In their Joint Communiqué, they stated that "they would continue to promote democratisation of international relations and evolution of a more just and rational international order". It is not clear what is meant by 'democratisation', because when the discussion touched the situation in Burma, our External Affairs Minister and his colleagues made it a point to emphasise: "There should not be any sanctions at this stage". The Generals must have been delighted to hear this. It is strange that India should so often align itself with China's position.

Notwithstanding these new echoes of friendship, every coin has two sides. One should remain 'pragmatic' and look at signs emanating from the other side of the Himalayas. First, an asphalted road, part of a China-Nepal Highway, is being built between Lhasa and the Nepalese border. According to the Tibet Communications Department, it will "make border trade between China and countries in South Asia more convenient".

With an investment of \$100 million, the 'renovation' work will be completed by the beginning of 2010. In China, when the Government announces 2010, it means that it will be ready by the end of 2009. China does not pay the price of being a democracy; projects consequently progress much faster. Anyway, Nepal is slowly becoming a Chinese colony.

Even more serious for India's security is the announcement last month that a highway linking Bome to Medok city (a distance of 141 km) will be constructed next year in Nyingtri Prefecture. Medok is located north of the McMahon Line, near the Great Bend of Yarlung Tsangpo (as Brahmaputra is known in Tibet). According to Chinese officials, Medok is today the only county in China which is still without a highway. More

than \$100 million have been earmarked for the project in the Tibet Autonomous Region's 11th Five-Year Plan. The interesting feature of this road is that it will connect Nyingtri to the Indian border. It could serve any future project on the bend of Brahmaputra, in particular a dam on the life-giving river plunging towards the sub-continent through the deepest gorges in the world.

Another development in the capital city of the same Nyingti Prefecture is the opening of one of the highest airports in the world (2,949 m above sea level). On September 1, the *People's Daily* reported that Niyngtri has "the world's most difficult airport to take off from or land due to its geographical terrain and volatile climate". It is said that it has handled over 50,000 passengers during its first year of operation. The Nyingtri prefecture borders Arunachal Pradesh and Burma and is the closest access to the Tsangpo gorges.

Nothing would be wrong about these developments if one had not heard of the scheme to divert Brahmaputra's water towards China. For Beijing to go ahead with the project, the two first steps would undoubtedly be the road to Medok and the airstrip in Niyngtri.

On the occasion of the 11th round of India-China boundary talks, Mr Wen Jiabao told National Security Adviser MK Narayanan that both sides had made some 'progress'. Progress or not, development of remote 'disputed' areas is going on in full swing on the Chinese side. Another airport, this time close to the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh, will soon be opened. China's online *Tibet News Service* reported that the construction work at Ngari Gunsa airport had begun on June 4. It will be the fourth 'civilian' airport in the Tibetan Autonomous Region after Lhasa, Nyintri and Pomda (apart from Lhasa, the three others are close to the Indian border).

Other worrying symptoms have recently come to light. It appears that sensitive information such as military data as well as e-mail of key persons in the Government have recently been hacked. According to an official, the National Informatics Centre has managed to track down the IP addresses of the hackers and investigations have revealed that they originated from China. When one knows of the close control on the Net by the Chinese Government, it is difficult to believe that some leaders in Beijing were unaware of these cyber attacks. Mounted from Internet connections in China, they targeted the e-mail of Ministers and top Army officials. Some sources said that at least 200 e-mail of Ministers have been hacked.

Meanwhile, Cabinet Secretary KM Chandrashekar has circulated a letter in which he has made clear that a function organised by Gandhi Peace Foundation and the All-Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet to felicitate the Dalai Lama for receiving the US Congressional Gold Medal is "not in conformity with the country's foreign policy" and hence does not warrant the presence of any member of the Cabinet. One wonders if it would not have been "in conformity with the country's interests" to ask our Chinese friends to lobby with the Nuclear Suppliers Group to support India getting the necessary fuel to run its nuclear plants. And why not ask them to help India to get a seat in the Security Council?