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## INDO-SINO RELATIONS

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### INTRODUCTION

**China-India relations** also called **Sino-Indian relations** or **Indo-Chinese relations**, refers to the bilateral relationship between China and India. China and India had historically peaceful relations for thousands of years of recorded history. But the tone of the relationship has varied in modern time, especially after the rule of Communist Party in China; the two nations have sought economic cooperation with each other, while frequent border disputes and economic nationalism in both countries are a major point of contention. The modern relationship began in 1950 when India was among the first countries to end formal ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and recognise the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of Mainland China. China and India are two of the major regional powers in Asia, and are the two most populous countries and among the fastest growing major economies in the world. Growth in diplomatic and economic influence has increased the significance of their bilateral relationship.

Cultural and economic relations between China and India date back to ancient times. The Silk Road not only served as a major trade route between India and China, but is also credited for facilitating the spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia. During the 19th century, China was involved in a growing opium trade with the East India Company, which exported opium grown in India. During World War II, both British India and Republic of China played a crucial role in halting the progress of Imperial Japan. Relations between contemporary China and India have been characterised by border disputes, resulting in three military conflicts – the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the Sino-Indian war of 1967, and the 1987 Sino-Indian skirmish. In early 2017, the two countries clashed at the Doklam plateau along the disputed Sino-Bhutanese border.

However, since the late 1980s, both countries have successfully rebuilt diplomatic and economic ties. In 2008, China became India's largest trading partner and the two countries have also extended their strategic and military relations. However, last year on 15th June 2020 at Galwan Valley (Ladakh), the armies from both sides were fortifying positions. It became a flashpoint and the armies clashed though the fight was close combat between the soldiers.

India reported a loss of 20 soldiers while China officially said that only four soldiers had died. The media reports were that a minimum of 30-40 casualties were there on the Chinese side too. This has been a major escalation since 1962 when the two armies clashed.

### AFTER INDEPENDENCE

On 1 October 1949 the People's Liberation Army defeated the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party). On 15 August 1947, India gained independence from the British, becoming a federal, democratic republic after its constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950.

The relationship between newly independent India and a newly communist China started out on an optimistic note. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime-minister of India, and Premier Zhou Enlai, articulated a vision of an internationalist foreign policy governed by the ethics of the Panchsheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) However, there was notable skepticism on the Indian side from the very beginning about Chinese intentions.

### 1950s

China viewed Tibet as a part of its territory. The preceding government of the Republic of China under Chiang Kai-shek also claimed Tibet as Chinese territory, however was unable to re-assert control. Mao saw Indian concern over Tibet as a manifestation of interference in the internal affairs of the PRC. The PRC reasserted control over Tibet and to end Tibetan Buddhism and feudalism, which it did by force of arms in 1950.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> To avoid antagonizing the PRC, Nehru informed Chinese leaders that India had no political ambitions or territorial ambitions and did not seek special privileges in Tibet but that traditional trading rights must continue.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> With Indian support, Tibetan delegates signed an agreement in May 1951 recognizing PRC sovereignty<sup>[citation needed]</sup> but guaranteeing that the existing political and social system of Tibet would continue.



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In October 1954, China and India signed an agreement regarding Tibet, whereby India recognised Tibet as part of China with China accepting the continuance of the previous trade arrangements. Observers noted the agreement heavily favoring China.<sup>1</sup>

It is the popular perception that the catchphrase of India's diplomacy with China in the 1950s was Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai, which means, in Hindi, "Indians and Chinese are brothers".<sup>[49]</sup> Nehru sought to initiate a more direct dialogue between the peoples of China and India in culture and literature. Around then, the famous Indian artist (painter) Beohar Rammanohar Sinha, who had earlier decorated the pages of the original Constitution of India, was sent to China in 1957 on a Government of India fellowship to establish a direct cross-cultural and inter-civilization bridge. Noted Indian scholar Rahul Sankrityayan and diplomat Natwar Singh were also there, and Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan paid a visit to PRC.

After signing the 1954 agreement, India published new maps showing defined borders, as it became apprehensive that China might make claims on Indian territory.<sup>[50]</sup> Two major territorial disputes existed between China and India, which remained dormant till 1959. In the northeast, Indian territory included the Assam Himalayan region up to the McMahon Line, which China did not recognise as a legal boundary. In the western sector, Indian territory inherited from the British Raj included the Aksai Chin plateau, which Chinese maps started showing as Chinese territory in the 1940s if not earlier.<sup>[51]</sup> When India discovered that China built a road through the region, border clashes and Indian protests became more frequent. In January 1959, PRC premier Zhou Enlai wrote to Nehru, pointing out that no government in China had accepted as legal the McMahon Line, which the 1914 Simla Convention defined the eastern section of the border between India and Tibet.

## 1960s

Border disputes resulted in a short border war between the People's Republic of China and India on 20 October 1962. The border clash resulted in an overall defeat of India as the PRC pushed the Indian forces to within 48 km of the Assam plains in the northeast. It also occupied strategic points in the Aksai Chin and Demchok regions of Ladakh, before declaring a unilateral ceasefire on 21 November. It claimed that it withdrew to 20 km behind its contended line of control. India disagreed with the claim.

During the Sino-Indian border conflict, India's Communist Party was accused by the Indian government of being pro-PRC, and many of its political leaders were jailed. Subsequently, the Communist Party of India (CPI) split with the leftist section forming the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1964.

Relations between the PRC and India deteriorated during the rest of the 1960s and the early 1970s while the China-Pakistan relations improved and Sino-Soviet relations worsened. The PRC backed Pakistan in its 1965 war with India, and issued "ultimatums" threatening military action at its own border. The threats only served to damage Pakistan's relations with the western powers. In late 1967, there were two more conflicts between Indian and Chinese forces at their contested border, in Sikkim, known as the Nathu La and Cho La clashes. Both sides suffered heavy casualties but India came out in a better position than PRC.

Between 1967 and 1971, an all-weather road was built across the Aksai Chin territory claimed by India, linking PRC's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region with Pakistan.

## 1970s

In August 1971, India signed its Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Co-operation with the Soviet Union. The PRC sided with Pakistan in its December 1971 war with India. Although China strongly condemned India, it did not carry out its veiled threat to intervene on Pakistan's behalf. By this time, the PRC had replaced the Republic of China in the UN where its representatives denounced India as being a "tool of Soviet expansionism."

India and the PRC renewed efforts to improve relations after Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Congress party lost the 1977 elections to Morarji Desai's Janata Party. In 1978, the Indian Minister of External Affairs Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a landmark visit to Beijing, and both countries officially re-established diplomatic relations in 1979. The PRC modified its pro-Pakistan stand on Kashmir and appeared willing to remain silent on India's absorption of Sikkim and its special advisory relationship with Bhutan. The PRC's leaders agreed to discuss the boundary issue, India's priority, as the first step to a broadening of relations. The two countries hosted each other's news agencies, and Mount Kailash and Mansarowar Lake in Tibet, the home of the Hindu pantheon, were opened to annual pilgrimages.



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## 1980s

In 1981, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Huang Hua made a landmark visit to New Delhi. PRC Premier Zhao Ziyang concurrently toured Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

In 1980, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi approved a plan to upgrade the deployment of forces around the Line of Actual Control. India also undertook infrastructural development in disputed areas. In 1984, squads of Indian soldiers began actively patrolling the Sumdorong Chu Valley in Arunachal Pradesh. In the winter of 1986, the Chinese deployed their troops to the Sumdorong Chu before the Indian team could arrive and built a helipad at Wandung. Surprised by the Chinese occupation, India's then Chief of Army Staff, General K.Sundarji, airlifted a brigade to the region. Chinese troops could not move any further into the valley and were forced to away from the valley. By 1987, Beijing's reaction was similar to that in 1962 and this prompted many Western diplomats to predict war. However, Indian foreign minister N.D. Tiwari and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi travelled to Beijing to negotiate a mutual de-escalation.

India and the PRC held eight rounds of border negotiations between December 1981 and November 1987. In 1985 the PRC insisted on mutual concessions without defining the exact terms of its "package proposal" or where the actual line of control lay. In 1986 and 1987, the negotiations achieved nothing, given the charges exchanged between the two countries of military encroachment in the Sumdorong Chu Valley. China's construction of a military post and helicopter pad in the area in 1986 and India's grant of statehood to Arunachal Pradesh (formerly the North-East Frontier Agency) in February 1987 caused both sides to deploy troops to the area. The PRC relayed warnings that it would "teach India a lesson" if it did not cease "nibbling" at Chinese territory. By the summer of 1987, however, both sides had backed away from conflict and denied military clashes had taken place.

A warming trend in relations was facilitated by Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988. The two sides issued a joint communiqué that stressed the need to restore friendly relations on the basis of the Panchsheel. India and the People's Republic of China agreed to achieve a "fair and reasonable settlement while seeking a mutually acceptable solution" to the border dispute. The communiqué also expressed China's concern about agitation by Tibetan separatists in India and reiterated that anti-China political activities by expatriate Tibetans would not be tolerated. Rajiv Gandhi signed bilateral agreements on science and technology co-operation, establish direct air links, and on cultural exchanges. The two sides also agreed to hold annual diplomatic consultations between foreign ministers, set up a joint committee on economic and scientific co-operation, and a joint working group on the boundary issue. The latter group was to be led by the Indian foreign secretary and the Chinese vice minister of foreign affairs.

## 1990s

Top-level dialogue continued with the December 1991 visit of PRC premier Li Peng to India and the May 1992 visit to China of Indian president R. Venkataraman. Six rounds of talks of the Indian-Chinese Joint Working Group on the Border Issue were held between December 1988 and June 1993. Progress was also made in reducing tensions on the border via mutual troop reductions, regular meetings of local military commanders, and advance notification about military exercises. In July 1992, Sharad Pawar visited Beijing, the first Indian Minister of Defence to do so. Consulates reopened in Bombay (Mumbai) and Shanghai in December 1992.

In 1993, The sixth-round of the joint working group talks was held in New Delhi but resulted in only minor developments. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Premier Li Peng signed a border agreement dealing with cross-border trade, cooperation on environmental issues (e.g. Pollution, Animal extinction, Global warming, etc.) and radio and television broadcasting. A senior-level Chinese military delegation made a goodwill visit to India in December 1993 aimed at "fostering confidence-building measures between the defence forces of the two countries." The visit, however, came at a time when China was providing greater military support to Burma. The presence of Chinese radar technicians in Burma's Coco Islands, which border India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands caused concern in India.

In January 1994, Beijing announced that it not only favored a negotiated solution on Kashmir, but also opposed any form of independence for the region. Talks were held in New Delhi in February aimed at confirming established "confidence-building measures", discussing clarification of the "line of actual control", reduction of armed forces along the line, and prior information about forthcoming military exercises. China's hope for settlement of the boundary issue was reiterated.

In 1995, talks by the India-China Expert Group led to an agreement to set up two additional points of contact along the 4,000 km border to facilitate meetings between military personnel. The two sides were reportedly "seriously engaged" in defining the McMahon Line and the line of actual control vis-à-vis military exercises and prevention of air intrusion. Talks were held in Beijing in



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July and in New Delhi in August to improve border security, combat cross-border crimes and on additional troop withdrawals from the border. These talks further reduced tensions.

## 2000s

In a major embarrassment for China, the 17th Karmapa, Urgyen Trinley Dorje, who was proclaimed by China, made a dramatic escape from Tibet to the Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. Chinese officials were in a quandary on this issue as any protest to India on the issue would mean an explicit endorsement on India's governance of Sikkim, which the Chinese still hadn't recognised. In 2003, China officially recognised Indian sovereignty over Sikkim as the two countries moved towards resolving their border disputes. In 2004, the two countries proposed opening up the Nathula and Jeleppla Passes in Sikkim. 2004 was a milestone in Sino-Indian bilateral trade, surpassing the US\$10 billion mark for the first time. In April 2005, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited Bangalore to push for increased Sino-Indian cooperation in high-tech industries. Wen stated that the 21st century will be "the Asian century of the IT industry." Regarding the issue of India gaining a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Wen Jiabao initially seemed to support the idea, but had returned to a neutral position.

In the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in 2005, China was granted observer status. While other countries in the region are ready to consider China for permanent membership in the SAARC, India seemed reluctant.

In 2005, China and India signed the 'Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity'.<sup>[65]</sup> However, there has been very little, if any, strategic convergence between the two countries.

Issues surrounding energy have risen in significance. Both countries have growing energy demand to support economic growth. Both countries signed an agreement in 2006 to envisage ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to placing joint bids for promising projects.

In 2006, China and India re-opened the Nathula pass for trading; Nathula had been closed 44 years prior to 2006. The re-opening of border trade helps to ease the economic isolation of the region.<sup>[67]</sup> In November 2006, China and India had a verbal spat over the claim of the north-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. India claimed that China was occupying 38,000 square kilometres of its territory in Kashmir, while China claimed the whole of Arunachal Pradesh as its own.

In 2007, China denied the application for visa from an Indian Administrative Service officer in Arunachal Pradesh. According to China, since Arunachal Pradesh is a territory of China, he would not need a visa to visit his own country.<sup>[69]</sup> Later in December 2007, China reversed its policy by granting a visa to Marpe Sora, an Arunachal born professor in computer science. In January 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited China to discuss trade, commerce, defence, military, and various other issues.

Until 2008 the British Government's position remained the same as had been since the Simla Accord of 1913: that China held suzerainty over Tibet but not sovereignty. Britain revised this view on 29 October 2008, when it recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet through its website. The Economist stated that although the British Foreign Office's website does not use the word sovereignty, officials at the Foreign Office said "it means that, as far as Britain is concerned, 'Tibet is part of China. Full stop.'"<sup>[75]</sup> This change in Britain's position affects India's claim to its North Eastern territories which rely on the same Simla Accord that Britain's prior position on Tibet's sovereignty was based upon.

## 2010 s

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao paid an official visit to India from 15 to 17 December 2010 at the invitation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He was accompanied by 400 Chinese business leaders, who wished to sign business deals with Indian companies. During this visit Premier Wen Jiabao said "India and China are two very populous countries with ancient civilisations, friendship between the two countries has a time-honoured history, which can be dated back 2,000 years".

In April 2011, during the BRICS summit in Sanya, Hainan, China the two countries agreed to restore defence co-operation and China had hinted that it may reverse its policy of administering stapled visas to residents of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>[85][86]</sup> This practice was later stopped,<sup>[87]</sup> and as a result, defence ties were resumed between the two countries and joint military drills were expected.

In the March 2012 BRICS summit in New Delhi, CCP General Secretary and Chinese President Hu Jintao told Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that "it is China's unswerving policy to develop Sino-Indian friendship, deepen strategic cooperation and seek common development". Other topics were discussed, including border dispute problems and a unified BRICS central bank.<sup>[88]</sup> In



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April 2012, in response to India's test of an Agni-V missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead to Beijing, the PRC called for the two countries to "cherish the hard-earned momentum of co-operation".

The 2013 Depsang standoff lasted for three weeks, before being defused on 5 May 2013. Days before a trip by Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid to China; Khurshid said that both countries had a shared interest in not having the border issue exacerbate or "destroy" long-term progress in relations. The Chinese agreed to withdraw their troops in exchange for an Indian agreement to demolish several "live-in bunkers" 250 km to the south in the disputed Chumar sector. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang made his first foreign visit to India on 18 May 2013. Indian President Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in late November 2013 and mentioning in his speech that the area was an "integral and important part of India" angered Beijing, and retaliatory statements followed. Xi Jinping, was one of the top world leaders to visit New Delhi after Narendra Modi took over as Prime Minister of India in 2014. India's insistence to raise South China Sea in various multilateral forums subsequently did not help that beginning once again, the relationship facing suspicion from Indian administration and media alike.<sup>[97]</sup> In September 2014 the relationship took a sting as troops of the People's Liberation Army reportedly entered two kilometres inside the Line of Actual Control in Chumar sector.<sup>[98]</sup> The next month, V. K. Singh said that China and India had come to a "convergence of views" on the threat of terrorism emanating from Pakistan.<sup>[99]</sup> According to a 2014 BBC World Service Poll, 23% of Indians view China positively, with 47% expressing a negative view, whereas 27% of Chinese people view India positively, with 35% expressing a negative view. A 2014 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center showed 72% of Indians were concerned that territorial disputes between China and neighbouring countries could lead to a military conflict.

China and India have been working together to produce films together, such as Kung Fu Yoga starring Jackie Chan. However, disruptions have risen again due to China building trade routes, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, with Pakistan on disputed Kashmir territory. On 16 June 2017 Chinese troops with construction vehicles and road-building equipment began extending an existing road southward in Doklam, a territory which is claimed by both China as well as India's ally Bhutan. On 18 June 2017, around 270 Indian troops, with weapons and two bulldozers, entered Doklam to stop the Chinese troops from constructing the road. Among other charges, China accused India of illegal intrusion into its territory, across what it called the mutually agreed China-India boundary, and violation of its territorial sovereignty and UN Charter.<sup>[112]</sup> India accused China of changing the status quo in violation of a 2012 understanding between the two governments regarding the tri-junction boundary points and causing "security concerns", which were widely understood as at its concerns with the strategic Siliguri Corridor. India media reported that on 28 June Bhutan issued a demarche, demanding China to cease road-building in Doklam and maintain the status quo. The Minister of External Affairs of India Sushma Swaraj said that if China unilaterally changed the status-quo of the tri-junction point between China-India and Bhutan then it posed a challenge to the security of India. China repeatedly said that India's withdrawal was a prerequisite for meaningful dialogue. On 21 July 2017, the Minister of External Affairs of India Sushma Swaraj said that for dialogue, both India and China must withdraw their troops. On 2 August 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China published a document claiming that Indian border forces had illegally crossed the border between China and India and detailed China's position on the matter. The document said that China notified India regarding its plan to construct road in advance "in full reflection of China's goodwill".<sup>[124]</sup> The Indian Foreign Ministry replied by referring towards their earlier press release on this matter, as opposed to a point-by-point rebuttal. On 28 August 2017, China and India reached a consensus to put an end to the border stand-off. Both of them agreed to disengage from the standoff in Doklam.

In May 2018, the two countries agreed to coordinate their development programmes in Afghanistan in the areas of health, education and food security. In 2019, India reiterated that it would not join China's Belt and Road Initiative, stating that it cannot accept a project that ignores concerns about its territorial integrity. On 11 October 2019, President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, India for a second informal meeting between India and China. Modi and Xi Jinping met 18 times between 2014 and 2019.

**2020 s**

On 10 May 2020, Chinese and Indian troops clashed in Nathu La, Sikkim, leaving 11 soldiers injured. Following the skirmishes in Sikkim, tensions between the two countries grew in Ladakh with a buildup of troops at multiple locations. There were 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of PLA soldiers killed on the night of 15/16 June.<sup>[135]</sup> China reinforced troops near the Indian border with Tibet, Chinese state media reported.<sup>[136]</sup> Bilateral agreements between India and China prevent the use of guns along the line of actual control; however these skirmishes saw the first shots, warning shots, being fired in decades.

Following the deaths, Prime Minister Modi addressed the nation about the incident, saying that "the sacrifice made by our soldiers will not go in vain", while the Indian foreign minister told the Chinese foreign minister that Chinese actions in Galwan were



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"pre-meditated". Following the Galwan Valley clash on 15 June 2020, there were renewed calls across India to boycott Chinese goods, however, numerous Indian government officials said that border tensions would have little impact on trade.

On 29 June, the Indian government banned 59 widely used Chinese mobile phone and desktop applications in response to rising tensions and escalating diplomatic dispute between the two nations.<sup>[142]</sup> On 19 August, Times of India reported that the ministry of external affairs of India has been told that visas for Chinese businessmen, academics, industry experts, and advocacy groups will need prior security clearance, and the measures are similar to those that have long been employed with Pakistan. On 19 September, India police arrested a freelance journalist for passing sensitive information to Chinese intelligence.

On 27 October, the United States and India signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), enabling greater information-sharing and further defense cooperation, to counter China's growing military power in the region.

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