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View Point

Bihar Chief Minister's Visit to China with a Holistic Agenda

*Sanjeev Kumar**

The seven-day visit by Bihar's Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar to China from 12 to 18 June 2011 was significant enough to create goodwill in India-China relations. The visit was part of India's efforts to remain constructively engaged with its important neighbour China, especially in the year 2011 which is the India-China Exchanges Year. Moreover, the visit also demonstrated that the CM had a holistic agenda to look for China's development experience especially its agriculture, rural development and clean energy plants and try to understand what can be learned as per the requirements of Bihar.

The Chief Minister interacted with various Chinese leaders. However, the initial highlight of his visit was his meeting with Ms Yan Junqi, Vice Chairwoman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China. Both leaders emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between India and China. During the roundtables at different levels of Chinese leaders, it emerged that China is keen to establish relationship at a level where a province of China can have a relationship with a state in India. This is not new for China. China's diplomacy has become increasingly multi-layered as provinces have emerged as some sort of international actors especially in foreign economic relations. It has also been reported that China has been impressed by the rapid economic development of Bihar and still considers 'virgin land' for investment. This could be a paradigm shift in India-China bilateral relations if both countries seriously explore the possibility of such multi-layered relationship. The CM's meeting with Ms Yan Junqi also demonstrated that he

was also interested in understanding China's decision making process and not merely visiting infrastructure sites.

The CM visited village Datmgzu in Shizui county, Shandong province to have first hand information about the farming practices and he also interacted with villagers of Anqiu. He was impressed with green houses and production of agriculture crops in a controlled environment. However, he rightly noted "There are many things to learn from China, such as how they implement [projects] but every country must stick to its own path." Further, the CM visited a Solar Panel Company in Jinan to look at the plant and enquired about using solar technology for power generation and water heating for industrial and domestic use. This is significant because improving electricity shortages in Bihar is a priority for his government and Chinese plants may provide lessons for a cost effective option for Bihar and other states of India.

The CM also interacted with the farmers of Anqiu Huzai Food Company Ltd in Shandong province, who are into commercial farming. It could be useful to understand the system of 'agricultural industrialization' in China. Agricultural industrialization which has developed rapidly in China since the 1990s is a kind of integrated management that combines agriculture production, trade and processing. It not only connects tens of thousands of small farmers; households and small-scale production with the big market; it also links city with countryside and modern industry with the agriculture sector in China. Further, the vital importance of the food processing sector in improving the income of peasants and generating employment in rural areas has been recognized in China. The Chinese government has also accorded the sector with a fiscal/tax concession to encourage commercialization and value addition to agricultural produce. The sector has enormous significance for the development of agricultural economies and hence efforts should be made to learn lessons from the Chinese experience.

The Chief Minister's announcement to send a delegation of farmers and legislators to China to understand China's development activities and techniques is a welcome statement. However, it is important that efforts should be made to learn practical lessons from the Chinese experience. This needs initiation of collaborative academic projects between research institutes of India and China on various projects

including 'agricultural industrialization' and food processing industries so that broad and specific lessons can be learned for Bihar as well as other regions of India. It may not be possible for Bihar to adopt the 'China model' but attempt should be made to learn important lessons and test it first as pilot projects in India.

During his visit to Shanghai, the CM also visited Zed Buddha temple where he was received by the temple Abbot. The CM discussed tourism potential of Buddhist places in Bihar and extended an invitation to Chinese Buddhist delegation to visit Bihar. Needless to say, tourism has the potential to create goodwill among people of both countries and contribute to the GDP of Bihar.

The final focus of his visit was his speech at the inauguration of the high profile international conference on "Buddhism: Mapping Asia's History and Culture" in Beijing on 18 June 2011. As it has been noted "Bihar, as the birthplace of Buddhism, is perhaps best positioned to articulate the old civilizational connect between India and China." The CM noted that Buddhism from India, found its root in several Asian countries including China and attempts should be made to find solution of global conflicts in accordance with Buddhist Philosophy. The CM also informed the gathering that Bihar state government is fully committed to the establishment of the Nalanda International University and the university would be a source of great pride for the state. A large number of delegations from India, China, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Japan, Thailand, South Korea and Vietnam participated in the two days conference.

The visit by Bihar CM to China is a testimony to the emerging multi-layered relationship between India and China. Certainly, it offers a new impetus to India-China bilateral relations by developing goodwill and understanding China beyond Beijing and Shanghai. There is a need for many such visits from both sides to understand each other and learn practical developmental lessons as a bottom up approach. After all, India and China are largely rural states with majority of population still living in countryside. Thus, it is not unusual that India's rich experience in many areas of rural sector has also been important issues of debate and research for Chinese researchers and policy-makers in recent times.

**Dr Sanjeev Kumar, Research Fellow, at Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi -110001*

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