

Opening Statement

by

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at

India-China Academic Dialogue (ICWA-SIIS)

at

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Dr. Chen Dongxiao, President, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), eminent members of the two delegations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. On behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this India-China Academic Dialogue. A specially warm welcome is extended to the distinguished members of the delegation from the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies SIIS.

About SIIS and ICWA

2. Let me first introduce our partner institution - SIIS to this August gathering.

3. Founded in 1960, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) is one of the top most research organizations for studies on international politics, economy, security, strategy and China's external relations. In November 2006, SIIS was rated as one of the “Top 10 Think Tanks in China” in the “First Forum on China’s Think Tanks” held in Beijing. The SIIS maintains academic exchanges and cooperative relations with hundred prestigious universities and leading research institutions in China and the world.

4. I am glad to note that Dr. Chen Dongxiao is leading his distinguished delegation from China. Dr. Chen is the President of SIIS since July 2013. He is a leading expert of China and has led and supervised numerous task forces on research projects entrusted by various government agencies, including Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance of China. Among the delegation members of SIIS, we are delighted to have amidst us Prof. Zhao Gancheng a distinguished expert on Asia-Pacific and India-China relations and young experts specializing in Asian affairs.

5. As this well-informed audience is aware, ICWA is the oldest and prestigious foreign policy think tank of India. Speaking in New Delhi on 21 May 2013, Premier Li Keqiang stated: “In its 70-year history, the ICWA has conducted productive studies on international issues and diplomacy”. It is due to the hard work of its researchers, associates and supporters that this institution has been moving on an upward trajectory.

Past Exchanges

6. I am delighted to recall my visit to the SIIS in November 2012. Our discussion at that time sowed seeds of cooperation between the two institutions. The first manifestation was the beginning of a structured, institution-to-institution dialogue in September 2013 when I led the Indian delegation to the First ICWA-SIIS Roundtable dialogue. Our candid and cordial discussions with the SIIS team on that occasion proved to be a productive exercise. We readily agreed on the need to hold regular interactions between our respective institutions to foster mutual understanding and mitigate differences.

7. Another positive result was the signing of an MoU between ICWA and SIIS on 6 September 2013 which opened avenues for different kinds of academic exchanges and cooperation between our two institutions.

Agenda

8. We have an agreed agenda. It will cover a fair number of key issues pertaining to global, regional and bilateral subjects. I should briefly touch on some of them at this juncture.

9. India-China relations are undoubtedly among the most significant relationships for both countries. With a population of one third of humanity, both India and China accord priority to their domestic transformation. However, there are convergences as well as divergences between India and China in their world views and shared peripheries in Asia. A peaceful and stable neighbourhood as well as conflict-free international environment is of utmost importance to both countries. Both the countries have entered into strategic and cooperative partnership in the 21st century. The question is: have we fully absorbed its implications and prepared the ground for utilization of its optimal potential?

10. Regular summits at the highest political level have played a significant role in our bilateral relations. ICWA has had the privilege of hosting H. E. Mr. Hu Jintao, President of the PRC in 2006, H. E. Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the PRC in 2010, Mr. Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council of the PRC in 2013 and H. E. Mr. Xi Jinping,

President of the PRC in 2014. All these honoured dignitaries delivered their public speeches from the ICWA platform, drawing considerable attention from the strategic community, media and others.

11. During his Special Address hosted by ICWA on 18 September 2014, H. E. Mr. Xi Jinping, observed: “China and India should be closer development partners, growth leading cooperative partners and strategic global partners”. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has described the India-China ties as moving ahead from “Inch (India and China) towards Miles (Millennium of Exceptional Synergy)”. And yet the border stand-off that accompanied the visit of the Chinese President managed to diminish its impact.

12. It is also true that many in our two countries and the world at large view China and India as competitors, rivals and even adversaries. We need to explore the ways and means to develop our partnership optimally and create conditions for deeper cooperation on complex issues such as borders, rivers, markets, creation of understanding and trust between two societies, and on a vast array of regional and global issues.

13. Further, we need to understand China’s policy towards its neighbours in a proper context. In what ways China’s diplomacy vis-a-vis its neighbours has an impact on its relationship with the main stakeholders in Asia? Further, is this time to strengthen the global quest for mutually beneficial multipolarity in Asia and the world? Do both China and India believe in the Asian dream and the desirability of securing the fruition of the 21st century as the ‘Asian century?’

14. Certain sections of Indian intellectuals and strategic thinkers are trying hard to decipher Chinese policies. Lack of convincing answers generate more questions, creating less clarity. Let us, therefore, hope that our day-long dialogue will seriously address the question of knowledge-deficit and perception-deficit between the two sides, and help each of us to understand better the view-point of the other side as also to deepen our convergences. This alone can help us to manage our divergences in future.

15. In the end, Ladies and Gentleman, let me express my confidence that this India-China Academic Dialogue would be candid, cordial and constructive and it would take us towards a positive direction. May I assure you that our delegation will do its best to secure this goal through our genuine goodwill and friendship towards SIIS, and our great neighbour, the People's Republic of China.

