

Opening Statement

by



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at

CPIFA-ICWA Dialogue

at

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Ambassador Yang Wenchang, President, Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), distinguished members of the two delegations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I bring to you all warm greetings of the Indian Council of World Affairs, India's premier and oldest foreign policy think tank, and a cross-section of our strategic community which is aptly represented by our delegation. We are deeply grateful to CPIFA for its gracious invitation to us for this Dialogue as well as the generous hospitality extended and superb arrangements made for our visit. We look forward to spending together a very productive and interesting day of deliberations today.

2. We are here to promote deeper understanding through frank and friendly discussion and debate. This, we hope, will provide a firm basis for closer cooperation and stronger friendship not only between our institutions but also our countries. It is evident that we speak not for our governments, but for our scholarly communities.

3. As a backdrop, it is worth recalling that our two institutions signed an MOU on cooperation in April 2005. We have had a few activities under this MOU in the past. We are conscious that our two countries play very important roles in world affairs and clearly their importance for each other has been on the rise. Recognising this, our institution established in 2012, a Core Group on China. Under its supervision, we produced and published a new book entitled 'The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: A Major Turning Point for China.' It is noteworthy that the Chairman of our Core Group on China, Ambassador C.V.Ranganathan, and four other members have been able to join our delegation. I am delighted to recall that, during my preparatory visit to China in November 2012, CPIFA readily agreed to begin a structured, institution-to-institution dialogue from this year. We are confident that after this first session, the next session would be held in New Delhi in 2014. We take this opportunity to invite the leadership of CPIFA to send its delegation for the next round of dialogue with us.

4. We already have an agreed agenda. It will not cover every issue that we may wish to discuss, but certainly a fair number of key issues pertaining to international, regional and bilateral subjects would be discussed. I should touch on some of them at this juncture.

5. International politics and economy are passing through a multi-faceted transition today. It is for scholars to identify the main trends, themes and issues as well as specific challenges and opportunities so that our nations understand each other better. This should allow them to expand their convergences, reduce divergences, and thereby enlarge the arc of cooperation, which alone will help us to promote our national interests in an enlightened and effective manner.

6. In this context, it may be helpful to spell out India's worldview as reflected in its contemporary foreign policy. India favours multi-polarity, a multi-polar Asia in a world with several pillars of power of different shapes and sizes. Secondly, India stands for promoting security and development for all, treating the two as inter-linked. Thirdly, it advocates inclusiveness, preferring to work through institutions such as UN and East Asia Summit (EAS) in which all stake-holders are present rather than through alliances that group together a few nations against others. Fourthly, it is pragmatism rather than empty, starry-eyed idealism that drives our policy. We wish to judge nations by their action rather than rhetoric. Our commitment to peace and peaceful co-existence does not preclude vigilance and our readiness to face all other eventualities. Further, India follows a policy of independence, a trait which many scholars consider as reflecting the principle of 'strategic autonomy'. Finally, our external relations are managed in such a manner that the economic dimension is kept in constant focus. Hence issues like climate change, link between development and energy security, an equitable flow of trade and services, access of developing countries to capital, technology and markets, and South-South cooperation assume considerable importance for us. After listening to your observations, our two sides would need to reflect on where our worldviews converge and where they diverge.

7. On regional issues, Asia is the primary ground of common interest to both China and India. East Asia faces new tensions and stresses today. Why? We should examine the apparent and underlying reasons. We would suggest (i) empowering EAS to deal with them and (ii) keeping ASEAN's centrality intact. South Asia is the region where many in India are critical of and express anxiety over China's strategy and actions. Are the motivations and outcome of China's policy adversarial to India's interests? We should exchange views candidly and

cordially in order to understand each other's view points. Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran suggest convergence of interests between us. What is the degree of convergence and how can we translate it into a programme of cooperation? Finally, West Asia too is important both to China and India: it is about energy security, the region's strategic importance, our common difficulties with the approach of Western nations and, in India's case, the Diasporic factors. How can we cooperate better? Looking beyond Asia, we should also cover the Indian Ocean, Africa, Latin America and Europe in our Dialogue, either now or at the next session.

8. Our discussion on regional issues will no doubt be informed, directly or indirectly by our understanding and analysis of the role of Great Powers in world politics today. Our lists of Great Powers and the sequence of their listing may differ, but this segment of our Dialogue would allow us to examine the role of, and our relations with, powers such as US, EU, Russia, Japan, ASEAN and others. We will also have an opportunity to exchange views on broader issues like UN reform and India's strong case for the permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Trends in groupings like G-20, BRICS, SCO etc. should also be discussed in order to identify the ways and means of increasing our cooperation and bridging such trust deficit as may exist.

9. We hope to leave ample time to attempt an objective evaluation of our bilateral relations as they stand today. In this context, I recall that ICWA has had the unique distinction of hosting public lectures by your eminent leaders, namely President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Premier Li Keqiang. 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." He went to add: "Without cooperation and common development between China and India, there will not be a strong Asia or a better future for the world." We agree.

10. Perhaps we may also need to recognise candidly that our relationship today is marked by an undercurrent of tensions. China and India are neighbours, friends and 'strategic partners', but it is also true that many in our two countries and the world at large view us as competitors, rivals and even adversaries too. Our shared challenge is to alter this perception and to allow the relationship to assume a more positive and benign orientation.

11. This, in our view, will be possible only when the reality of China-India relationship is understood fully. Let us push for deeper cooperation on such complex issues as borders, rivers, markets, people-to-people ties, creation of understanding and trust between two societies, and their place in the world. Relations need to be improved and expanded further through sincere and sustained endeavour. We need to reconcile creatively our interests and our viewpoints through a constructive approach. We should be ready to cooperate and also allow each of us to grow in our own fashion, convinced that there is ample room for both our countries on the world stage today.

12. In the end, dear friends, let me express my confidence that the Dialogue 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 you.

Thank you for your attention.

