

Opening Remarks

by

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**at the
Inaugural Session of the
'First India China Think-Tanks Forum'**

at
Sapru House, New Delhi
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Prof. Wang Weiguang, President, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and members of his delegation;

Shri M. J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs;

Prof. Patricia Uberoi, Chairperson, Institute of Chinese Studies;

Prof. Alka Acharya, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies;

Members of the Indian delegation;

Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to Sapru House.

We at the Indian Council of World Affairs, India's oldest foreign policy think tank, are delighted to co-host this first India-China Think-Tanks Forum.

A special welcome to the Chinese delegation led by Mr. Wang Weiguang, President, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Mr. Wang is no stranger to India. This is his second visit.

Both India and China have a rich tradition of scholarly research and discussion and think-tanks have an important place both in the academic and policy circles in our countries. As such, regular and structured engagements and exchanges between the think-tank communities of the two countries can contribute greatly to enhancing understanding of issues on both sides. Think-tanks can be potent vehicles for bridging the deficit with respect to mutual understanding and appreciation and thereby further the development of bilateral relations, based on mutual understanding and trust, between the two nations.

The signing of the MoU between India's Ministry of External Affairs and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) for the establishment of this India-China Think-Tanks Forum during the visit of Prime Minister Modi to China in May 2015 was an important event in furthering academic engagement and providing an institutional mechanism for result oriented and meaningful discussions between the academic communities on both sides. This MoU is a timely recognition of the enhanced role think-tanks play in bilateral, regional and global affairs. It provides the much-needed institutional platform to enhance exchanges in the fields of area-studies, security, economy and strategic thought.

As two major powers that are rising simultaneously, and with strong leadership on both sides, China and India must enhance their understanding of each other in managing their rise. This is particularly true in an era of uncertainty in global politics and economy.

The importance of think-tanks and academic enterprise has been recognized through the establishment of this Forum. There is now great expectation that our discussions will yield results and propose positive, constructive and practical ways for furthering our bilateral relations. It would also be incumbent upon us at the Forum to confront the issues which can and are casting a negative shadow on the otherwise positive trajectory of India-China bilateral relations. In effect, we must help enhance strategic communication between our countries.

India-China relations have today become mature and stable. India attaches priority to its relations with China and is committed to further developing friendly and cooperative relations with it. The core of India's vision for its bilateral relations with China is of a truly good neighborly relationship that is based on a high degree of trust and understanding with a strong intersection of common interests.

India's relations with China have witnessed considerable diversification in recent years. High-level political exchanges as well as economic interaction have significantly expanded. These have helped in developing understanding at high political level and to consolidate and broaden our relations.

Notwithstanding the persisting imbalance in bilateral trade, economic and trade engagements have emerged as a major highlight of our bilateral relations. These, however, remain relatively narrowly focused.

In the last few years India has made considerable effort to welcome Chinese investment and create an atmosphere for developing and deepening India-China trade and economic ties. Such engagement has brought the peoples of our two countries closer. The understanding of each other's society, economy and culture is improving as a result.

Bilateral economic ties will, however, continue to require an equitable arrangement for sustainable growth. Unjustified and sustained imbalances or barriers will only act as serious obstacles to mutually beneficial cooperation.

Today, more than in any other period in the past, Chinese and Indians are visiting each other's country for various purposes. India has also liberalized its visa policy to encourage more Chinese visitors to India. These initiatives and developments are important since increased exchanges and engagement can lead to enhanced mutual understanding, which in turn is critical for furthering mutually beneficial bilateral relations.

As the two largest developing countries in the world, India and China have also shown willingness to partner together to safeguard the interests of the developing world. This can be seen on the issues of Climate Change, on reshaping of the global financial order and collaboration in mechanisms ranging from G-20 to BRICS. Our two countries issued a “Shared Vision for the 21st Century” in January 2008 that reflects the congruence of our interests on regional and international issues, and our willingness to work together in those areas.

We must look ahead. Without the joint efforts of India and China, there cannot be a fruitful outcome to developing a security architecture for Asia, for Energy Security, for Cyber Security and other issues on the global commons. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to collaborate on these issues not only to mutual benefit but also in the interests of the region and the international community at large.

While we seek comprehensive development of our ties with China, this is hindered by China’s position on some issues of importance to us where we expect greater cooperation and understanding. On these issues, so far, however, we have seen responses which, in our view, have much scope for improvement. Many a times these fall short of China’s own professed principled positions on those issues. A response that convincingly demonstrates sincerity and appreciation of our core concerns, interests and aspirations will go a long way in addressing the perceived lack of mutual trust that has arisen as a result.

I strongly believe that our joint effort should be to bridge the gap between the principles that are espoused, for instance on sovereignty issues and the positions and actions that are taken. If such gaps are in perception and not in reality, our effort should be to dispel such erroneous perceptions. However, if such gaps are real, we should take remedial action. Only then, would we as two major countries, be able to live up to the expectations of our people and the people of Asia to usher in the Asian Century.

If I have to enumerate some of the important issues where such gaps exist, let me start with terrorism. China’s response to an issue of global importance should not be guided by local and regional considerations. There cannot be a differential approach to terrorism. We welcome China’s ‘zero tolerance’ and ‘no double or multiple standards’ approach against terrorism. We expect that it should get translated in all cases equally emphatically through actions and positions. China’s current position on listing of known terrorists in the UN conveys a perception that it is taking sides. It is important that the global fight against terrorism unites our two countries. It is also important that global issues where we have common interests and common positions do not become divisive bilateral issues. That would simply not be in our common interest.

Our dialogue on regional issues also needs to be strengthened. We are committed to developing wider and closer cooperation and understanding in regional affairs. Our shared interests require us to work more closely on issues such as Afghanistan, sharing of common resources & regional connectivity. This requires broad, detailed deliberations with important and

affected stakeholders, not unilateral initiatives which can have serious implications for other partners. Regional economic development cannot nullify concerns over sovereignty.

Cooperation on climate change is a success story that needs to be emulated in other sectors. However, we have some concern that India's aspirations for developing civil nuclear energy are not receiving the understanding that is expected from a close partner on the climate change issue. China could have used this opportunity to bring our two countries even closer. It would have opened another area of cooperation and given new strength to our Closer Developmental Partnership.

The world economy's travails show no signs of ending. The impact of the global financial and economic crisis continues to debilitate the world economy and individual economies. Both our countries have been seriously impacted. Questions are being asked whether globalization needs to be or is being rolled back. In this context, China as the world's second largest and fast growing economy requires to demonstrate that it is not turning its back on the open global economic system that enabled it to grow at an unprecedented pace for so long and so dramatically. It must help correct mistakes and anomalies in the existing international system such that growth impetuses are revived worldwide. This will no doubt mean absorbing some pain.

These are some of the issues which unless properly addressed, have the potential to cast a negative shadow on the otherwise progressive development of our bilateral relations. I have no doubt that China too has areas of concern to it. This is where the role of think-tanks becomes crucial. It is important that gatherings such as this discuss difficult issues with sincerity and candour. As long as we are clear in our ultimate objective of the desirability and necessity of the further development of a closer Developmental Partnership, we will be able to find solutions.

I am confident that with the participation of this erudite group of academics and scholars on both sides, this Forum will play an important role in our mutual effort for developing our bilateral relations. This is the beginning of a process and we trust that this Forum will meet regularly, annually, in each other's country by turn, and if necessary more than once a year on issues of specific interest.

Once again, a very warm welcome to our distinguished friends and colleagues from China & India and to all those present here today.

Thank You.
