

Press Questionnaire of Kyodo News

Response by Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy, Director General of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi (former Ambassador to Japan 2015-2018)

1. How has the Galwan tragedy changed India's perception about China as a neighbour and an Asian power?

Answer: The death of 20 unsuspecting Indian military personnel, including a Colonel-rank Commanding Officer deployed in the Galwan Valley along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), in a sneaky attack by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) using barbaric medieval weapons on June 15, has sent shock waves throughout India. Once attacked, the brave Indian soldiers fought like lions, and despite being greatly outnumbered, killed many more on the Chinese side before going down. The Indian Foreign Minister, Dr. Jaishankar, conveyed India's protest to his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in the "strongest terms" for its "premeditated and planned" action that was directly responsible for the resulting violence. The Chinese action was part of an insidious intent to change the facts on ground in violation of all bilateral agreements that prohibit the use of force and unilateral action to change the status quo. This incident can have a serious impact on the bilateral relationship. The need of the hour is for China to reassess its actions and take corrective steps to restore peace and tranquillity.

For many years now, China has used a unilateral and ever-changing concept of its Line of Actual Control to gradually seek more territory. This is similar to its aggressive actions in the South China Sea in complete violation of the UNCLOS treaty. India has never accepted China's unilateral definition of its so-called LAC. Despite numerous agreements, it is most unfortunate that China has refused to exchange maps to identify differences, which is the first step in the delineation and demarcation of the LAC. Recent events in the border areas indicate that Chinese troops are not adhering to several agreed-upon Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and drills for face-offs in the border regions. Agreements once reached between the two sides ought to be respected. China has been building its own border infrastructure over the years and yet tries to prevent India from developing its own border infrastructure.

China's rise has not been smooth. The developed countries took one hundred and fifty years to reach a state of lasting equilibrium among themselves after undergoing a long process of industrialisation and multiple wars. In China's case, change has been so rapid that it is not just the outside world that has found it difficult to adjust to China's rise. China itself seems unable to fully comprehend the implications of the change.

Rising powers must understand the true meaning of 'power', especially its limits and also the backlash that the injudicious application of power invites when used to coerce others. China expects the entire world to adjust to its rise. However, it appears unwilling to grant the same understanding and respect to other countries across Asia which too have progressed in recent decades. China needs to understand that Asia has never been monolithic, nor will it ever be, given that it is the cradle of many civilisations like India, Japan, China and Korea and many resilient nations, each with their own dream for the future.

2. Do you think this incident will prove to be a game changer in India-China relations? Where is China-India relations heading, in your opinion--India has warned China that failure to implement the disengagement deal on the LAC in eastern Ladakh would have consequences?

Answer: India has always strived for peaceful and cooperative relations with China. But China has failed to reciprocate. Today, the public sentiment in India is very strongly rallying against China. This is a direct consequence of its actions on the border as well as its close security ties with Pakistan aimed at undermining India's sovereignty and territorial interests.

India remains deeply sensitive to China's support for Pakistan, including on the activities in Pakistan of terrorist groups and individuals that have been proscribed by the United Nations. China's presence and activity in the Indian Ocean region is non-transparent and a matter of growing concern. China's inroads in South Asia are aimed at eroding the traditional goodwill that India enjoys and creating dependencies among India's neighbours.

The recent standoff has highlighted the urgent need for a reset in bilateral ties. There is a need for reciprocity in relations. Recent events

are likely to impact quite adversely on bilateral trade and investment ties. It definitely cannot be business as usual.

India and China have done well to engage in multilateral fora such as BRICS, SCO, the recently held meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China in the RIC format and in the G-20. In the past, India and China have also cooperated well in establishing the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). However, of late the multilateral space for cooperation has been shrinking especially with China proactively taking negative positions at the UN Security Council on India's internal matters such as Jammu and Kashmir.

India attaches importance to its relations with China. Our two countries have coexisted for millennia and will have to do so in the future too. But the terms of the relationship cannot be set unilaterally by China. Just as it takes two hands to clap, so also China will have to reciprocate India's goodwill and cooperation in order that we can live in peace and provide the right environment for economic growth and progress in both countries.

3. Is there a possibility of a wider armed conflict between the two countries or will it be limited to India simply putting restrictions on Chinese trade and investment?

Answer: India is committed to a dialogue for the peaceful resolution of differences. Like Japan, India is a peace-loving country. India is the country that gave to the world the principles of *Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) through the teachings of Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi.

However, no self-respecting nation can be expected to cave in to China's totally unjustified revanchist territorial claims, least of all India. In a choice between cowardice and violence in the face of colonial depredations, even Mahatma Gandhi, that apostle of peace, said that he would "rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour".

India has a strong and capable leader in Prime Minister Narendra Modi who enjoys wide popular support. India is resolute on issues pertaining to its territorial integrity and sovereignty, and will do everything to protect them. This sentiment was reflected in Modi's recent statement that India

does not provoke anyone, but if provoked, India is capable of giving a befitting reply as demonstrated in at Galwan in Ladakh. It is up to China to decide what kind of a relationship it wants with India.

India's desire for peace should not be misconstrued as a weakness.

Trade and investment are important elements of our cooperation with China but here too we have seen no effort on China's part to redress the yawning trade deficit and barriers that Indian exports face in the Chinese market.

4. Do you see India abandoning its longstanding policy of neutrality and shifting focus on strengthening Quad?

Answer: Strategic autonomy implies that India takes its own decisions.

At the same time, the world is changing. Uncertainty is the only constant. Power, whether economic, political or military, is fractured. The alignment of the Cold War period is a thing of the past. Hedging and multi-alignment is on the rise. Today, India is cooperating with multiple countries based on shared values and interests. India, US, Australia and Japan have a convergence of views on the emerging geostrategic and geo-economic changes in the Indo-Pacific. Issue-based aligning with strategic partners is, therefore, a key pillar of India's foreign policy.

The QUAD is a multilateral grouping of four sovereign countries. Recently, it has expanded its consultations to include other like-minded countries such as Vietnam, South Korea, New Zealand and even Brazil and Israel. The QUAD has the freedom to decide its own destiny. Whether the QUAD sticks to a developmental and capacity-building agenda or shifts toward greater focus on security and military matters will depend on the evolving regional situation.

5. This week secretary of state Mike Pompeo said that China's "threats to India" and Southeast Asia were among the main reasons for the US's move to reduce its troops in Europe, and today (Friday) leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations at the 36th ASEAN Summit sought to stress the importance of "freedom of navigation over-flight" over the South China Sea. How important are these developments amid India-China face-off?

Answer: India stands for an open, transparent and inclusive rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific with freedom of navigation and overflight. This includes the South China Sea. There is no room for unilateralism and coercive behaviour that threatens peace and development in the region. There is a broad consensus among the key stakeholders like India and Japan on these issues.

Today, the world is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a compelling need for countries to join hands to tackle it. However, global institutions, including the UNSC, have failed to take action.

In difficult times like these, countries should not try to exploit the vulnerabilities of others. China should refrain from taking advantage of the pre-occupation of others to engage in adventurism on territorial issues.

China's recent aggressive actions against Vietnam, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and even Indonesia are very disturbing, to say the least. The ASEAN countries have a valid point, when they say that UNCLOS and the freedoms of navigation and overflight should be respected by China.
