



Significance of Vice President's Visit to China

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The state visit of Shri M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India from June 26-30, 2014, the first visit to China after the formation of new government in India, has been covered widely by the Chinese as well as English media in China. The Chinese government has termed the visit as “successful” and said that the visit has given boost to “in-depth growth of friendly cooperation” between the two countries. The visit has proved important partly because it marks a step forward in terms of India’s political, economic and cultural dialogue with China and partly because it generated significant debate on the issues raised by the visiting Indian leader during his astute speeches at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and at the commemoration of 60th anniversary of Panchsheel at the Great Hall of People in Beijing.

As it was stated in the official announcements, the Vice President visited China to hold bilateral discussions and to participate in the activities celebrating the 60th anniversary of Panchsheel or Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in 2014, the “year of India-China friendly exchanges”. The Vice President was accompanied by a high level delegation which included Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, four Members of Parliament and the Foreign Secretary of India. Apart from holding delegation-level talk with Chinese Vice President Mr. Li Yuanchao and raising issues of concern, Vice President Mr. Ansari also met Premier Li Keqiang and called on President Xi Jinping.

In terms of tangible outcomes, three important agreements/MoUs pertaining to cooperation on Industrial Parks in India, implementation plan for sharing of hydrological information on Brahmaputra river in flood season, and communication and cooperation for training in the area of capacity building of public officials between the two countries were signed.

Under the first MoU, the two countries have agreed to cooperate to increase investment in each other's economies. New Delhi has attached importance to the establishment of Chinese Industrial Parks in India. This is primarily because it would be helpful in rebalancing India's US\$ 40 billion trade deficit with China; reduce the need to import Chinese goods, which have become quite popular in India: and give a boost to the manufacturing sector of the economy, which is important for the overall growth and employment generation in India. As it has been stated by some experts, India could also set up Industrial Parks in China in pharmaceutical and IT sectors.

The MoU on Brahmaputra flood data is also significant. China not only agreed to provide 15 days additional hydrological data but for the first time, has allowed India to send hydrological experts to conduct study tours. There are reports of construction of new hydropower dams on Brahmaputra, but the Chinese government maintains that they were just run-of-the-river projects and would not divert Brahmaputra's waters. Significantly, some Indian experts have expressed their concern that the environmental catastrophe for the North-Eastern region of India, and for much of Bangladesh, cannot be fully ruled out. China should consider entering into an institutional mechanism to deal with concerns of its neighbours involving water issues.

Further, it is expected that the first-ever training programme between Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie and China Executive Leadership Academy, Shanghai will help both rising powers to learn from each others' experience.

It is noteworthy that the Vice President's speech entitled "Calibrated Futurology: India, China and the World" aroused significant interest in Chinese media. The Chinese version of the whole speech was published at some news websites. Further, some statements from the speech

were particularly emphasized by the media. It is logical to understand the context in which these statements received wider attention in China.

The Vice President's acknowledgement that the Five Principles of Panchsheel "enunciate the basic guidelines for the establishing a new political and economic order" (while addressing CASS) and "Panchsheel provides the framework within which a just and equitable global order can be achieved" (while addressing at the commemoration of 60th anniversary of Panchsheel) was widely quoted and emphasized by various media sources in China. For China, this is significant in the context of President Xi Jinping's quest for establishing a new security framework for Asia where Asian countries will manage their affairs and the external powers, especially the US, may have little role to play. As a rising power, China plans to design an alternative framework for Asian geopolitics and the statement provides opportunity for China to express its solidarity with the Asian principles.

"Our common interests far outweigh our differences" is another statement from the Vice President's speech which received wide coverage. The statement reciprocates Chinese government's approach towards New Delhi, reflected in India being selected as the first destination for foreign visit by Premier Li Keqiang.

Further, the Indian Vice President's comment that he hopes "to see China become a developed country soon" received wider attention in China. This is understandable because the current debate in China revolves around the issue of creating a moderately prosperous as well as developed society in China.

It is also significant that the Vice President evaluated the role of Panchsheel as a framework for India-China relations. An analysis is required to evaluate implementation of the principles in India-China relations. He said, "The record is a mixed one, but improving". The 1962 conflict was a moment of departure from the principles of Panchsheel in the India-China bilateral relations. It led to disenchantment with the significance of Panchsheel in India. The historic visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in 1988 marked a new beginning in India-China relations. The successive leaderships of both the countries have built the relationship to

the level of strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity. What is more important today is to assure that the signatories to the documents, including the Panchsheel, also make a serious commitment to the compliance with the letter and the spirit of the Principles. On many occasions, the adoption of the Panchsheel has been a matter of convenience.

The Vice President also suggested a valuable framework for both the countries and the world. He saw, “A trend of multi-polarity emerging in the global political landscape...India and China should cooperate for mutual benefit in this evolving and developing framework”. This could serve the interests of rising powers in Asia and the world. As it has been stated by an Indian expert, “world’s interests are best protected through a conscious promotion of multi-polarity and an inner equilibrium among various poles or pillars of power”. The need is to avoid any negative perceptions and developments in India-China bilateral relations and their approach to global affairs.

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