

EDITORIAL

COMPETING IN A CHANGING WORLD



Ajit Kumar Thakur
Editor & Business
Director

“
Despite remarkable growth in certain sectors, the nation, by and large, remains globally uncompetitive, especially in manufacturing. This persistent under-performance requires urgent and focused attention from the government.”

As we enter the final quarter of 2024, India, the world's fifth-largest economy by dollar GDP, finds itself at a critical juncture. Despite remarkable growth in certain sectors, the nation, by and large, remains globally uncompetitive, especially in manufacturing. This persistent underperformance requires urgent and focused attention from the government.

India's economic trajectory is tightly interwoven with its security challenges. A sustained and robust economic growth is essential to build deterrent capabilities in an increasingly volatile geopolitical scenario. The last decade has witnessed a surge in India's innovation ecosystem, propelled by significant investments in research and development and a booming start-up culture. However, the country must tackle its structural inefficiencies head-on, if it is to capitalise on these developments and achieve long-term competitiveness. While there is much talk of India's start-up success stories, the underlying challenges—such as limited access to capital for small enterprises, bureaucratic red tape, and a lack of infrastructure—continue to hinder widespread innovation.

Looking forward, India must navigate the formidable economic challenges posed by China. The trade deficit between the two nations remains a pressing concern, and the overcapacity in Chinese industries poses a direct threat to Indian manufacturing. For India to continue its trajectory as the fastest-growing economy among the G20 nations, it must aggressively work to reduce its reliance on Chinese imports, while simultaneously fostering an ecosystem that supports domestic production and innovation. The government's reforms and stimulus measures have helped to some extent, but more needs to be done such as bolstering the domestic supply chains and investing in high-end manufacturing, absorbing all forms of external shocks.

In the geopolitical arena, India's stature has grown, particularly in the last quarter (June-September 2024). However, it would be premature to celebrate just yet. India's rise is fraught with contradictions. On one hand, its partnership with countries like the United States has deepened, as exemplified by the strengthening India-US technology partnership. On the other hand, India's domestic challenges paint a distressing picture.

The global conflicts, particularly the Israel-Hamas and Ukraine-Russia wars, continue to cast long shadows over India's strategic interests. The Middle East, a crucial region for India's energy and trade, has become increasingly unstable. The escalating violence threatens maritime trade routes, notably the Red Sea, upon which India heavily depends.

In domestic developments, the *Swavlamban* initiative has fostered collaboration between more than 200 MSMEs and start-ups under the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme. The upcoming *Swavlamban 2024*, scheduled for late October, promises to build on the past, with a renewed focus on innovation and indigenisation. However, while such initiatives are commendable, India's MSME sector still struggles with systemic challenges, and without addressing these foundational issues, the full potential of *Swavlamban* and other initiatives may remain unrealised.

As we mark the 92nd anniversary of the Indian Air Force (IAF), we congratulate this vital institution for its continued transformation. The IAF has undergone significant modernisation, but there remains much work to be done, particularly in terms of acquiring advanced technology and addressing gaps in training and resources. The celebratory air displays on Foundation Day were a reminder of the IAF's dedication, but these outward displays must be matched by inward reforms to maintain superiority in an increasingly challenging global military milieu.

In this edition, we present a comprehensive analysis of contemporary issues, with a special focus on the IAF and a detailed report underscoring the importance of establishing a National Aerospace Policy. As India's aerospace sector grows, a coherent and forward-looking policy framework is essential to harness the sector's full potential. This edition also covers the usual wide-ranging, in-depth analyses of defence and security matters, aimed at providing our readers with the most relevant and insightful information.

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Happy Reading! Jai Hind!!

(Ajit Kumar Thakur)

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DECODING PM MODI'S US

The Prime Minister Modi's visit, aimed at enhancing India's diplomatic ties with the United States, came at a time of rising global tensions. Modi attended the Quad meeting, addressed the diaspora and the UN General Assembly, and met top tech CEOs. PM's visit offered an opportunity for India to present newer perspectives to the world. Modi's announcements will be tested in the months to come

By **VINAY KUMAR**



An important milestone in India's international relations and presence on the global stage was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-day visit to the United States from September 21 to 23, which has been described as 'successful and substantial'.

During the visit, PM Modi attended the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) Leaders' meeting, addressed an Indian community event and also addressed the 'Summit of the Future' at the UN General Assembly.

The Prime Minister also held bilateral meetings with his Japanese and Australian counterparts on the sidelines of the Quad Summit and exchanged views to deepen bilateral cooperation further for mutual benefits and the 'peace, stability, and prosperity' of the Indo-Pacific region.

PM Modi's visit aimed at enhancing India's diplomatic ties and strengthening collaborative efforts with the US. It was a substantial visit from India's point of view as PM Modi returned to power for the third successive term and the US is witnessing

the end of President Joe Biden's term and is in the grip of presidential elections. Moreover, the visit came at a time of rising global tensions and an atmosphere of uncertainty.

From the outcome of the Quad Summit talks it can be noted that key topics included health security, climate change, emerging technologies, connectivity, maritime security, and counter-terrorism steps. A major highlight was the launch of the Cancer Moonshot, an initiative aimed at combating cancer in the Indo-Pacific.

PM Modi's visit was also significant on many counts. Before his US visit, PM Modi had made important visits to Russia and later to Poland and Ukraine. The US visit offered an opportunity for India to further strengthen its partnerships and present newer perspectives and options to the world.

During his trip, PM Modi attended the Quad Leaders' Summit in Wilmington on September 21 and also engaged in bilateral discussions with world leaders and held a roundtable with CEOs from leading American tech companies.

PM Modi noted that the Quad leaders assembled at a time of global tensions, emphasising that their collaboration is important for all of humanity. He stressed that they are 'not against anyone' and they support a rules-based international order, respect for sovereignty, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Observers saw this as a subtle reference to China's assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific region. At the meeting, the PM described the grouping as a 'Force of Global Good', and added, "It is here to stay, partner and contribute."

On the third day of his visit, PM Modi addressed the UN's Summit of the Future and said that the "success of humanity lies in our collective strength, not on the battlefield."

The Quad Summit had been delayed due to political cycles in the four member countries. The joint statement sharply noted



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US President Joseph R. Biden at Greenville, Delaware

VISIT, QUAD SUMMIT

Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The leaders upheld the UN Charter on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Clearly, Beijing will not see it in a kind light and raise its tempers over the announcement of initiatives aimed at countering Chinese actions. Some key initiatives include a 'Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission' for 2025, a Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) and a 'maritime legal dialogue' to support the 'rules-based order'. Significantly, India will assume the presidency of the Quad next year and the Quad Summit is scheduled to be held in India in 2025.

PM Modi's message at the UN as well as in bilateral meetings with leaders including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was keenly watched on the global stage. India has spoken about its involvement in the peace process. PM Modi's talks with President Zelensky focussed on a possible second peace summit.

At a diaspora event, Prime Minister Modi said India is now a 'strong voice' of the Global South, and was taking up the concerns of the developing world on the conflict with the global leadership.

At the UN 'Summit of the Future', PM Modi said the success of humanity would depend on its 'collective strength, not in the battlefield'. Whether PM Modi's ambitious peace plan and other ideas take shape in the future or not over the next few months will be keenly watched by the global community and leaders.

As India is making efforts to lay its hands on high-end technology, another key engagement of PM Modi was his participation in a 'fruitful' roundtable with the CEOs of leading American tech companies where he emphasised India's growth prospects and discussed initiatives to foster bilateral collaborations across various sectors. It witnessed the participation of CEOs of major US-based firms working on cutting-edge technologies such as AI, quantum computing and semiconductors.

Prime Minister Modi urged CEOs of US majors to take advantage of India's growth story as the country is making all efforts to become the third largest economy in the world in his third term.

He told the top tech CEOs from the US to enhance cooperation between India and the US in cutting-edge technologies. Among those in attendance were Sundar Pichai from Google and Shantanu Narayen from Adobe.

Technology giants Google and Nvidia appear set



Prime Minister Modi at the QUAD Leaders' Summit in Delaware, USA

to deepen their engagement in India, focusing on harnessing Artificial Intelligence technology, it was indicated by top officials after the roundtable.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang noted that PM Modi has consistently shown a strong interest in understanding Artificial Intelligence and its potential benefits for India. "I have enjoyed so many meetings with the Prime Minister. He's such an incredible student, and every time I see him, he wants to learn about technology, Artificial Intelligence, the potential and opportunity for India, the impact on India, society and industry," Huang said.

PM Modi highlighted India's rising status as a global leader in technology and innovation during his meeting with top tech CEOs. He emphasised India's progress in sectors such as semiconductors, electronics, and workforce development, stressing the country's dedication to becoming a key player in the global economy.

Modi also made a mention of India's focus on 'Design in India', aiming to bring innovations to the global market. He announced an additional USD 15 million investment in the semiconductor industry as part of this effort.

India's announcements will be tested in the months to come – if any visible progress is made on realising their implementation on the ground. There is no doubt that India will make all-out efforts to latch on to the emerging high-tech and cutting-edge technologies. It will be a major gain for India if it wants to emerge as a key player in the world arena. ■

–The writer is a senior journalist and media consultant. The views expressed are of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of Raksha Anirveda

At the Quad summit, PM Modi emphasised that they are 'not against anyone' and they support a rules-based international order, respect for sovereignty, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Observers saw this as a subtle reference to China's assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific region

THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

In the last 78 years, the Indian foreign policy has pursued a policy of non-alignment. However, in the last decade this has gone a major change, with a focus on soft diplomacy and outreach coupled with muscular posturing. But this has not helped India to become a regional power, much less a global power

By **ASAD MIRZA**



The Indian Foreign Policy till date has evolved through three distinct phases. The first phase from 1947 to 1991, saw the domination by of the USA and the USSR and the resultant Cold War era. As a recently independent nation the country's founding fathers adopted the policy of non-alignment. Maintaining equidistant from the two superpowers the Indian leaders to ensure political, security and economic support from both camps, adopted this approach to set the newly independent nation on a path of its own, besides emerging as the voice of poor nations or those which were still under colonial rule.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, heralded the second phase from 1991 to 2008. During this phase, the USA emerged as the major political, economic, and military power, while other nations or bloc like Russia, China, Japan, Brazil and the EU vied to change the world from a bi-polar to a multipolar world.

The third phase from 2008 till today, saw the emergence of more emerging economies like South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. In addition, the emergence of new economic and trading organisations like EU, ASEAN, BRICS, IBSA, SCO, and many smaller and regional trading blocs gained much traction. Or in other words this phase saw the emergence of globalisation at a much faster pace and economic diplomacy taking precedence over political and defence challenges.

Indian foreign policy responded dynamically to these changes with non-alignment abandoned completely, and the Indian diplomacy focussing more on the USA, China, P-5 member countries, in addition to a proactive neighbourhood policy.

Furthermore, the third phase can still be sub-treated from 2014 onwards, with the introduction of a 'muscular diplomacy' epitomised by PM Modi taking shape. This period also saw the increasing disillusionment of the West with China and the realisation that for countering China, India could be their best bet. India's demography, a growing fast-paced economy, and its key location in the Indo Pacific, all contributed in India's favour.

In addition to this, from 2014-onwards, Indian government's proactive 'Neighbourhood First' philosophy also found greater resonance around the region and globally, too. Added to this is PM Modi's desire to be at the centre stage of the global politics, besides becoming the voice of the Global South.

The regional approach to the Indian Foreign Policy as envisaged by the Modi government is premised on the fact that a secure and cooperative neighbourhood will be good for the country's overall development and security. This was demonstrated by the invitation extended by Mr Modi to state heads of all SAARC countries to his swearing-in ceremony in 2014.

From 2014 onwards, India tried to shed its baggage and instead of just focussing on a policy which was obsessed with Pakistan primarily, India started focussing on China and USA and Russia to build a stronger and more effective partnership, besides adopting a much more prudent and proactive approach to different global issues. During the last ten years, India has successfully expanded and diversified relations in economic, political, strategic, connectivity and cultural spheres with ASEAN countries as well as Japan, Australia, Republic of Korea, and others.

In addition, the period also witnessed a further maturing of ties between India and the United States. PM Modi bonded well with three US Presidents, viz., Obama, Trump and Biden at a personal level.

However, a more realistic or a candid analysis of the Indian Foreign Policy also points to some chinks in India's approach, particularly to its neighbours and regional organisations.

It would not be wrong to say that during the last ten years, apart from a curious initial bonhomie with Pakistan under PM Modi, relations between the two countries have really worsened. Further during this period, India completely gave up the ideals of non-alignment, though to a certain extent it still maintains an equidistant relationship with both the USA and Russia.

Further during these ten years, India has joined



From left: Australian Prime Minister Albanese; Indian PM Modi; US President Biden and Japanese PM Kishida at Quad Summit

many new regional organisations or alliances, but it seems to have completely given-up on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation or SAARC. Though new organisations like BIMSTEC and BBIN have been promoted, but they do not have vast mandate or effectiveness like SAARC.

In fact, it would have been much more prudent for India under Modi to revive the SAARC. An organisation established in 1985 and dedicated exclusively to India's immediate neighbours, would have worked wonders for building-up a positive image of India, both regionally and globally, had it used the organisation to promote regional cooperation diligently. The importance of SAARC could be gauged from the fact that an organisation which just controls 5-6% of the global economy, was given due preference by countries like China and Russia, both of which wanted to be Observer nations at SAARC.

Meanwhile, India has not been able to give a real political or economic challenge to China. During the last ten years, China's economic influence in the region has grown phenomenally. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative – BRI, is present in every neighbourhood country except Bhutan. Even at the diplomatic level, PM Modi's interactions with the Chinese President Xi Jinping, 18 so far, have not resulted in any resolution of the LAC issue.

Also, the Modi government's muscularity and blurring of the domestic and diplomatic policies interchangeably have also created problems with the neighbours. Its plans for an Akhand Bharat have not gone well with some neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. Further, relations with Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka are also not hunky dory, despite India acting as a Big Brother and helping these nations at the time of their economic crises.

Meanwhile, during the last two years, in particular after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, India has sought to pursue its international goals, skilfully playing Western adversaries off one another. This has been made possible by the Indian economic heft, its proactive

approach has led to increased weightage given to it in multilateral negotiations devoted to tackling global and transnational challenges, and most of all its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific has led to it being courted by nearly all major powers.

But still, the question persists that whether India has been able to achieve its goals or not? The answer soothes the nay-sayers, as it India has not been able to maintain a continuously cordial relationship with even one of its immediate neighbours, at the global level its wish for a permanent seat at the UNSC has not fructified, though all current members endorse the view that India should be made one.

Perhaps, in order to sit at the global high-table, India may have to tweak its foreign policy to accommodate the global demands, but its ultimate test will be to emerge as the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific region by pursuing a more realistic or an elastic policy towards its immediate neighbours, by taking their interests also in account.

This may lead to a more cohesive bilateral or a multilateral approach by assuaging the concerns of the neighbours that the regional development could be more realistically achieved if we follow a policy of regional peace and cooperation. But that is easily said than done, as it may lead to India being labelled and acting as a Big Brother. To undo that categorisation it would be more prudent if India at first enhances its Soft Power outreach amongst the immediate neighbours and after achieving a greater acceptability there, it should embark on its global campaign to be seen as a country, which needs to be consulted or involved in every major global affair. ■

-The writer is a political commentator and media consultant, based in New Delhi. He can be contacted on www.asadmirza.in. The views expressed are of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of Raksha Anirveda

In order to sit at the global high-table, India may have to tweak its foreign policy to accommodate the global demands, but its ultimate test will be to emerge as the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific region

NEGOTIATING THE STANDOFF WITH CHINA

Despite intensified dialogue between India and China, core issues remain a challenge, with military disengagement and territorial disputes still unresolved. Yet, the persistence of high-level meetings signals a cautious path towards stability

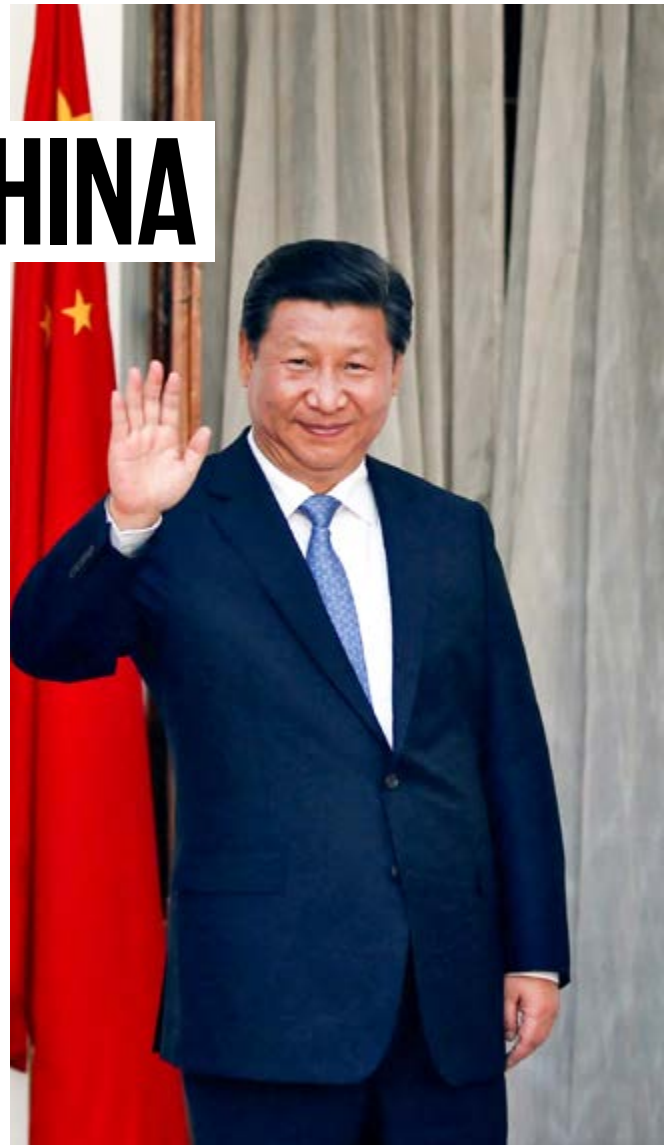
By **NEERAJ SINGH MANHAS**



The India-China border standoff has continued into 2024, marked by persistent tensions, though there have been some diplomatic efforts to ease the long-standing disputes. The focus remains largely on the Western Sector, where the border issue continues to strain relations between the two nations. However, recent diplomatic talks offer a glimmer of hope for de-escalation and stability. Throughout the year, both India and China have stepped up their diplomatic efforts, including several meetings under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC), on India-China Border Affairs with the 30th and 31st sessions held recently.

This uptick in meetings, the most since the Galwan clashes in 2020, shows an effort from both sides to find some common ground and ease the tensions along the disputed border. Still, a major breakthrough remains elusive. High-level discussions, including talks between defence and foreign ministers and even direct exchanges between national leaders at global summits, have not yet resolved the core issues behind the standoff. Negotiations continue to focus on creating effective disengagement plans and establishing buffer zones to prevent further clashes.

China continues to maintain a strong military presence along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), leveraging its superior infrastructure and military strength to reinforce its position. Part of this posture seems aimed at discouraging India from drawing too close to anti-China coalitions, particularly as broader geopolitical shifts, such as the Dalai Lama succession and the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region, come into play. The ongoing standoff



Chinese President Xi Jinping with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

reflects deeper strategic competition, with both countries vying for influence not only in Asia but globally. India's engagements with partners like the US, Japan, and Australia in response to China's moves have added further complexity to its relationship with Beijing.

By late 2024, while the border remains a source of tension, the increased diplomatic talks and a relatively stable military situation—with no major escalations—offer some cautious optimism. Both sides appear to be exploring ways to stabilise the situation, although significant hurdles remain. The international community continues to keep a close watch on developments, hoping for a peaceful resolution that ensures regional stability.



In July 2024, India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S Jaishankar, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met twice to discuss the prolonged border standoff and broader bilateral issues. The first meeting, during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, saw Jaishankar stressing the need for disengagement at the border, noting that ongoing tensions hurt both nations. Their second meeting, on July 25 at the ASEAN foreign ministers' gathering in Vientiane, Laos, showed some progress, with both ministers agreeing on the need for "strong guidance" to complete the disengagement process in Eastern Ladakh.

Jaishankar reiterated that peace along the LAC is essential for normalising relations between India and China, underscoring the importance of mutual respect and sensitivity in managing bilateral ties.

However, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted a more reserved tone in its statement, emphasising dialogue, communication, and the building of mutual trust while focusing on broader cooperation between the two countries as neighbours and developing nations. Their official readout made a brief mention of the border situation, simply noting a mutual commitment to maintaining peace in the area and continuing border consultations, while placing greater emphasis on shared aspirations for the "Global South."

At the 30th meeting of the WMCC, held in New Delhi on July 31, 2024, both sides reaffirmed the need to uphold peace and stability in the border regions in line with existing bilateral agreements and protocols. This meeting came just days after Jaishankar, during a speech in Tokyo on July 29 following the Quad Foreign Ministers meeting, strongly rejected any involvement of third parties in resolving the India-China border dispute, insisting that the matter must be resolved bilaterally. He also noted that relations remain strained due to China's large-scale incursion across the LAC in 2020, which resulted in heightened military tensions at a time when India was grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

While diplomatic talks continue, China has pressed ahead with infrastructure developments in the Ladakh sector, including the construction of a heavy-duty bridge in the Pangong Tso area. This bridge is capable of transporting tanks and enables China to quickly mobilise forces on both sides of the critical sector, further raising India's security concerns. Pangong Tso was a flashpoint for clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in August 2020, and this latest development adds to the sense of unease along the border.

In response to China's advancements, India is accelerating its own infrastructure projects in the north-eastern regions, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh, a territory China claims as part of its own. India has announced plans to invest USD 1 billion in constructing 12 hydropower stations in the region. This move could further strain relations with China, especially as there are reports that Beijing is considering building dams on the Brahmaputra River, known in China as the Yarlung Tsangpo, which flows from Tibet into Arunachal Pradesh.

On August 29, 2024, India and China convened the 31st WMCC meeting in Beijing, marking the second such meeting within a short period. This followed the guidelines laid out by their foreign ministers during the meetings in Astana and Vientiane in July 2024. Both sides described the

As India and China hold multiple meetings, including the 30th and 31st sessions of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination, diplomatic efforts are in full swing. However, despite the frequency of these talks, a definitive breakthrough remains elusive as both nations struggle to resolve the standoff along the Line of Actual Control

NEIGHBOURHOOD



Prime Minister Narendra Modi in discussion with Chinese President Xi Jinping

With tensions still high along the India-China border, the development of military infrastructure by both sides raises concerns. Yet, ongoing diplomatic exchanges, such as Dr Jaishankar's discussions with his Chinese counterpart provide hope

exchange of views as “frank, constructive, and forward-looking,” and expressed a commitment to “narrowing down differences” and finding a swift resolution to the ongoing border issues. This appears to reflect a slight softening of previously entrenched positions and suggests that diplomatic and military engagements are intensifying in an attempt to break the deadlock.

On August 31, 2024, at the *Economic Times* World Leaders Forum, during a session titled “New India’s Risks, Reforms, and Responsibilities,” Jaishankar delved into the unique challenges India faces, particularly in its relationship with China. He noted that, apart from the ongoing border tensions, India also struggles with a growing trade deficit with China, which is driven by China’s long-established economic advantage due to its distinct political and economic system. Jaishankar stressed that understanding the uniqueness of India’s situation is crucial in developing effective policies for managing its ties with China. He also emphasised the need to scrutinise Chinese investments more carefully, explaining that the issue is not whether to allow investments from China, but rather how to determine the appropriate level of scrutiny and oversight.

In response to concerns raised by Indian industries, the Indian government has agreed

to expedite the processing of business visas for Chinese technicians involved in manufacturing projects. The Ministry of Home Affairs introduced new guidelines, effective from August 1, 2024, aimed at fast-tracking visa approvals for nationals from China and other countries that share land borders with India. This move is intended to address challenges faced by firms investing in 14 strategic sectors under India’s production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, which are designed to strengthen the country’s manufacturing capabilities and reduce its reliance on imports.

The India-China border standoff in 2024 highlights the deep complexities of the relationship between the two nations. The broader geopolitical competition between India and China is further complicated by concerns over trade imbalances, infrastructure development, and competing regional alliances. Nonetheless, the continued dialogue and a relatively stable military situation at the border provide some grounds for cautious optimism that a peaceful resolution could eventually be reached.

—The writer is a Special Advisor for South Asia at the Parley Policy Initiative, Republic of Korea. He regularly provides commentary on India-China border issues, water security, and transboundary river challenges in South Asia. You can follow his updates on X at @The_China_Chap. The views expressed are of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of Raksha Anirveda

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RUNFLAT WHEEL ASSEMBLY



UNIT - I

Plot No. 31/B IDA,
Balanagar, Hyderabad
Telangana, India - 500 037.

UNIT - II

C-18, Industrial Estate,
Sanathnagar, Hyderabad
Telangana, India - 500 018.

UNIT - III

Plot No. B-30, Technocrat Industrial Estate,
Balanagar, Hyderabad Telangana,
India - 500 037.

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