



**Strategic Eye**



A column on current affairs - relating to India and/or Canada and looking at ways to promote Indo-Canadian relations in many spheres.

# The Takeaways from Xi Jinping-Modi Mamallapuram Informal Summit

*Both Sides Avoid Discussion On Kashmir; Need For Communication Remains A Focal Point*

By Bal Kishan Sharma @

The informal summit, coined as Chennai connect, between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi concluded at the heritage town of Mamallapuram on 12 Oct with equivocal outcomes.

The purpose of the summit as described by China's Ambassador to India Luo Zhaohui said the purpose was for two leaders to have free exchange of views without fixed topics. The chain of events preceding the summit had dampened the prospects of this important summit. China's overt support to Pakistan on Kashmir at the UNSC, UNGA, during Imran Khan's recent visit to Beijing and remarks by China's ambassador to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue had ruffled Indian feathers.

In the interregnum Indian and Chinese troops had briefly locked horns in Eastern Ladakh and Beijing was miffed with India conducting tri service military exercise in the northeastern theatre.

The mere fact that the two sides confirmed the participation in informal summit at the eleventh hour speaks for looming uncertainties about the meeting. Finally, the informal summit took place in a very congenial environment and the two leaders were able to arrest growing negative trajectory in their bilateral relations. Prime Minister Modi said, "our Chennai vision today has launched a new era of cooperation between our two countries".

The sides scrupulously avoided discussions on Kashmir and focused on positives. However,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping enjoy coconut water at Pancha Rathas complex in Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu on Oct 11, 2019. (Photo: IANS/MEA)

there was neither a joint declaration issued nor any Memorandum of Understanding signed. From official statements and media reports one could gauge major takeaways from the summit and crystal gaze into future trajectory of bilateral relations.

At Wuhan Xi - Modi informal summit on 27 Apr 2018, the two leaders had agreed to mitigate competitive component in the bilateral relations, heed respective core interests, institute guidelines on the CBMs to maintain peace and tranquility at the border, focus on building strategic communication, practical cooperation, enhancing cultural exchanges and finding a new 'modus vivendi' in relations.

The tone and tenor of recent dialogue devolves around similar issues. The need for maintaining strategic communication despite vicissitudes in the relations has

been reinforced. The resolve to maintain peace at the border in the framework of 2013 Border Defense and Cooperation Agreement is another welcome step.

It is hoped in the next round of boundary talks, the two sides develop institutionalized mechanisms to either avoid or jointly patrol the so-called disputed areas along the Line of Actual Control and pave the way for its delineation. Countering terrorism is another significant area of convergence. The India foreign secretary said that both countries will work on radicalization and terrorism. China has adopted somewhat ambivalent and selective approach to dealing with India-centric Jihadi groups hounded by Pakistan. China must discourage Pakistan from using cross-border terrorism as a state policy. Both countries have high stakes in building peace in

Afghanistan. The two countries have recently cooperated in training Afghan diplomats. Scope exists for both countries to undertake joint projects in Afghanistan.

Despite hiccups the bilateral trade has grown to impressive \$ 96 US and shows more potential for growth albeit with a skewed balance of trade (\$ 66 billion in Chinas' favour). Hopefully, with the creation of High level Economic and Trade Dialogue Mechanism' headed by India's finance minister and China's vice premier, the trade imbalances will get addressed and bilateral trade boosted. Likewise, removing irritant such as fear of China dumping her goods in Indian markets will ease the way for India joining the China led RCEP. China, on the other, expects India to shed off intransigence and permit entry of Huawei 5 G technology in the Indian digital technol-

ogy market.

The selection of Mamallapuram, 1400-year-old temple complex as the venue was well-thought out as it signified historical Silk route linkages between India and China as also showcased India's rich civilizational past. The two leaders impressed upon the need to blend the idea of 'Mystique China' with 'Incredible India', invigorate people to people contact and boost tourism

Wuhan spirit and Chennai bonhomie may be feel good factor, but geopolitical reality remains that China and India will compete for domination of resources, location and influence. Structural factors in the relationship suggest that Sino-Indian relation will remain competitive.

China is a de-facto super power with a GDP of \$ 14 trillion, foreign reserves over \$ 3 trillion and a formidable military state. But Beijing can ill-afford to overlook India's growing stature and confidence in protecting her core interests. It is therefore imperative for both countries to respect each other's core interests and find a new 'modus vivendi' in steering the destiny of their nation and Asia for a better future.

Prime Modi sagaciously said, "The two countries have agreed to prudently manage our differences and not allow them to become disputes". Time has now come to walk the talk.

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