

## NEHRU TIBET AND CHINA

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Other distinguished participants in the Webinar.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak to the esteemed members of the EGROW Foundation and other participants and share my views as reflected in my book "Nehru, Tibet and China". I would like to say at the very beginning, my book is a challenge to the conventional story that has been handed down to us since the fifties of the last century. My presentation today is fully backed by the highly classified documents of the Ministry of External Affairs which I accessed in recent years and are already published in a 5-Volume book.

History is a cruel subject and it does neither recognise friends nor foes. As Prof. Toynbee said:

**Historical changes are driven by challenge and response and civilizations are defined not just by the leadership or conditions but by how they responded to difficult problems or crisis.**

I have no doubt you would see my presentation in perspective of history. It was not easy for me to write this book. Before deciding to write it, I debated within myself should I give a counter narrative of the story that the people have accepted as true and authentic for the last almost sixty years. The story emerging from my research was so compelling and I argued that unless the people know the real story and the reasons for what had happened, the problem of sixty years would never be solved. My aim has been to bring to notice of the people the facts as emerging from my research and it

is now for them to take a call. That was the trigger for writing this book.

India - China problem had been with us since our independence. The leaders who were in command of the situation immediately after 1947 were all veterans of the freedom movement. Their credibility was very high. People accepted what they said and did. This particular applied to Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister.

Jawaharlal Nehru both as a Prime Minister and Foreign Minister guided our foreign relations for all the years from independence until his death in 1964. The war that happened in 1962 did not last more than a month starting on October 20 and ending with China calling a unilateral ceasefire on November 21. But the aftermath of the war is with us for decades. And no resolution of it appears in sight. Whenever there is a border incident, we look for measures to defuse that crisis leaving the older issue to fester.

The book, apart from discussing the border question, also goes into earlier years of interaction between the two countries when they apparently had succeeded in forging a deep and abiding friendship. We looked at China not only as our friends but our brothers: Hindi Chini; bhai bhai, a slogan that mesmerised the people of India for quite sometime. There was no critical analysis of Chinese behaviour.

The book while discussing the border question which is our current problem, also goes into other aspects of the relations too. The roots of that problem could be traced to those issues that have become history now. You will appreciate no single incident or issue is an isolated phenomena. It always has roots somewhere.

The war as you know was a big disaster for India. It exposed our unpreparedness. The claims that the prime minister repeatedly made that India was prepared to face any eventuality and India

would not tolerate any invasion of not only India, but also Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal proved hollow.

A read of the book would tell us how the prime minister vetoed suggestions for strengthening the defence structure. He relied too much on factors which were foreign to India. Whenever a question of China's or Pakistan's aggressive attitude was raised, he would say we have asked our ambassadors across the world to brief the host countries and when those countries speak to the Chinese, they would be ashamed and change their stand. Other countries might sympathise with you but to expect them to take up cudgels on your behalf was an unsustainable expectation. To meet the demand for strengthening of the army, he suggested strengthening of the NCC and the Territorial Army. These were neither in the past nor now a fighting arm and not even part of the para-military forces.

India had inherited certain facilities and privileges in Tibet from the British as also the borders. The British were a powerful entity in this part of the world until they left India. The countries in its periphery were no match for their military prowess. They had to fall in line with their diktats. But after the end of colonial rule the tables were turned. Unlike the British, India was no longer in a position to enforce its writ. China was taken as a weak country before the communist revolution. Once the communist party took over, it had emerged a strong-willed country with a powerful army: the People's Liberation Army. It did not feel shy to use it either. For quite some time India continued to believe that new China was like the Kuomintang China and it was possible to deal with it like in the past. This was a problem of perception and Nehru failed to read it well. Soon he admitted the Kuomintang government was better since it did not raise the problems that the Communists were raising.

The problem that persists between our two countries today is that of frontiers. I will concentrate on this aspect in my talk. Before that I think it is necessary to understand how we misunderstood the ground situation and failed to read the signals emanating from Beijing.

Communist China after replacing Kuomintang regime in the civil war established the People's Republic of China on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1949. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was keen to recognise the new regime at the earliest so as to be the first among the non-Communist countries to do so. There was pressure from the United States to delay the recognition. Warding off American pressure India when finally recognised the new regime it did become the first non-communist country to do so.

Ironically even before India had recognised Communist China, it was taken by surprise by the Tibetan Government. In October 1947, within a couple of months of Indian independence, Tibet had asked India for return of their territories which the British in the past had gradually occupied and integrated in India. Their demand was vast and extensive. It asked for return of Sikkim, Bhutan, Darjeeling, Ladakh and many more areas. Later Prime Minister had remarked that if India had complied with the Tibet's demand, India's borders would have come down to the Ganga.

Nehru attracted to the idea of Asian solidarity remained passionately committed to it. It was his conviction that to achieve the Asian solidarity, cooperation of China, the other big country in Asia, was necessary. He wooed it systematically. Even before the Communist revolution, the Asian Relations Conference organised by Nehru in March 1947 was the first step in that direction. That it turned out to be not a very happy experience is another story.

Reading Nehru's pre-independence writings and statements would convince anyone that he had become infatuated with China. In fact his infatuation goes back to the year 1927 when he met the Chinese first time in Brussels while attending the Conference against Imperialism.

His other statements immediately before and after independence left no one in any doubt that his approach to China was emotional. He assiduously wooed the new regime. In the process he made several compromises to achieve his cherished dream but in vain. Whether China was in equal measure anxious for that, remained somewhat under question mark. He himself doggedly pursued his agenda. It is no wonder that in India a feeling was created among the people generally that China was India's best bet for peace in Asia and for achieving Asian solidarity. In Nehru's and therefore in public perception the idea of India-China friendship got ingrained.

Unfortunately for Nehru, China was not much attracted to India or Nehru. To start with, China suspected India the Trojan horse representing the imperial interests of the Americans and the British, and called him their lackey.

China too suspected India trying to preserve its privileges and facilities in Tibet that the British had bequeathed it. India's plea for Tibetan autonomy was taken as part of India's agenda to preserve its position in Tibet while undermining that of China. This naturally came in conflict with China's decision to "liberate" and integrate Tibet with itself. China giving no space to India, bluntly told Delhi that Tibet was its internal affair and no interference of any kind in its internal affairs would be tolerated. It too declared that India's establishments in Tibet were unacceptable. This message however did not register in New Delhi and India continued to urge China to

respect Tibet's autonomy and be patient in dealing with it. China abhorred Indian advice.

If we were to put to test Communist China's friendship for Nehru or India, we would be disappointed. A look at the decade of fifties, when Nehru had to deal with China, lack of their friendship for him or India stands out in bold relief. To start with as already pointed out, China abused Nehru as the lackey of the British and the Americans, representing their imperial interests. When the Tibetans expelled the Chinese Amban (representative) based in Lhasa in the wake of Communist revolution, China held India to be complicit in his expulsion despite India's denial. China described India's relations with Bhutan as part of the dark vassal system and described it as Bhutan's enslavement which China said the United Nations should examine.

As China invaded Tibet in 1950, request for Dalai Lama's asylum had been accepted by India. Later in the face of China's warning against it, the Pontiff was hinted to stay back. Taking the cue he chose not to come. Disparaging remarks on the conduct of India's first General Elections in 1952 were ignored. Nehru got the wrong end of Chinese stick on Indian resolution in the UN General Assembly on the repatriation of Korean prisoners of War. China had described Nehru's resolution as the parent of all evils. This was humiliating but Nehru did not protest and kept Chinese reaction under wrap after ensuring that China did not intend to carry it further. He only told the Foreign Secretary that when he happened to meet the Chinese Ambassador in normal course, not especially, he should tell him to use at least a better language for us. After all this he said he did not want to lose the Chinese friendship.

As China nibbled at India's inherited facilities and harassed Indian establishments in Tibet, India entered into a fresh agreement and

gave up all the unilateral facilities it had enjoyed in Tibet. India expected this would allow the Indian establishments to breathe easy. On the contrary their harassment only increased. Their functioning became almost impossible.

While negotiating the agreement on Tibet, India found to its chagrin and embarrassment that China was more sensitive to Pakistan's interests than India's. Ambassador Raghavan was peeved at the lack of any appreciation from China for India's efforts on its behalf. His lament to Nehru did not draw any reaction and was ignored in Delhi. As China's position after it had occupied Tibet, came under challenge by the Tibetans and they revolted, China saw in India a villain in everything that went wrong for it in Tibet and described Kalimpong as the epicentre of Tibetan revolt. Even Zhou Enlai himself during his visit to New Delhi on December 31, 1956 spoke to Nehru that the Tibetans and others based in Kalimpong were creating problems for China in Tibet; Nehru took it lightly, laughed it out and said Oh! Kalimpong was a nest of spies and there were more spies there than the residents. It confirmed to China that Kalimpong was indeed the villain of a piece. Hereafter China continued to complain to Delhi in notes and also in person to the Ambassador in Beijing about the encouragement which in China's perception Kalimpong was providing to the rebels in Tibet. India's denial had little impact on Beijing.

Since Kuomintang Government was still occupying China's seat in the United Nations and permanent seat in the Security Council, with the American support, Nehru made his unsolicited mission to get Communist China replace Kuomintang China. China did not consider it necessary to feel obliged and even express appreciation of Indian efforts. On the contrary, India pointing out to Beijing that its toxic policies in Tibet were hampering India's efforts at the UN, China was not bothered and continued to follow its agenda of liberating Tibet.

Nehru did not take the hints that if he did not canvass for Beijing, India could get the permanent seat at the horseshoe table, since he said China would not appreciate it and would take it as an unfriendly act. Irony is the same China today opposes a permanent seat for India in the reformed UN Security Council.

Similarly Nehru had taken upon himself to get China recognised internationally. While in the process he incurred the odium particularly of the United States, Beijing neither acknowledged nor appreciated his efforts.

Having successfully sold the *bhai bhai* relationship to the people of India he remained anxious to preserve it. He did not react in any manner as would give the people a contrary impression. Despite all the differences with China and the rebuffs China had administered whether on Tibet or on any other count, Nehru ensured that the unsavoury developments were kept away from the people.

It was possible to do so in the pre-internet age. As you all know there were no independent sources of information then. The newspapers and the All India Radio gave only that information that was dished out by the government. Those days there were no loud and uninformed debates as we see these days. The people believed what the Government thought fit to put in public domain. As pointed out earlier, the leaders at the helms of the affairs particularly Nehru, were veterans of the freedom movement and their credibility with the people was very high, they did not question them.

Dichotomously Nehru saw in China's rise, the resurgence of Asia from the ashes of colonialism and accepted it as a senior member of the Asian community, since he always referred to China as a great country.



Nehru's hallucinations about India-China -Tibet relations were unfathomable. On the one hand he was impressed with China's greatness and on the other he was worried about its long-term intentions towards India. He was reconciled to China's takeover of Tibet but wanted it to respect Tibet's autonomy. He knew China had never recognised the Simla Convention yet he insisted that India would stand by it and China should also accept it.

After these preliminary remarks let me now turn to the border question which continues even today to cast its shadow regionally and internationally.

India's borders with China are in three parts--The northeast, northwest and central sector. The Central sector which runs along the borders of the states of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal did not cause much problem, as compared to the other two parts. Yet the initial Chinese intrusions began in the central sector, which were essentially probing missions. China found that India's reaction was passive in such cases.

The border in the north east of India was known by the name 'McMahon Line'. In the west India's border in Ladakh along the Aksai Chin area was UNDEFINED in the survey of India maps at the time of India's independence in 1947. The maps which Survey of India reprinted in 1951 until 1954 continued to show the border as UNDEFINED.

As a backgrounder, it would be worthwhile to give you a brief idea of the McMahon Line. Until 1912 the British as a matter of their frontier policy had promoted Chinese supremacy in Tibet. In the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, to which China was not a party, both the Russians and the British accepted China's overall control in Tibet and both agreed to deal with Tibet only through China. However in 1912 there was reversal in the British policy. It was

decided to make Tibet dependent on itself by detaching it from China. The British proposed a tripartite conference of themselves, China and Tibet to sort out ostensibly the relations between China and Tibet. Under pressure from the British the Chinese against their better judgement agreed to join in the proposed conference. It was held in Simla. The conference for most part discussed the relations between China and Tibet. The frontiers were not even discussed at the conference. Henry McMahon while presenting the draft of the Convention introduced Article 9 in the draft along with maps which had two lines marked on them: Red for Tibet-India and Blue for Tibet-China borders. China refused to accept Article 9 and the maps. Eventually China did not sign the Simla Convention. It continued to maintain that there was no discussion on the borders at the conference and they should not be included.

Finally the Convention was signed only by Tibetan and the British representatives. Further attempts made by the British to get China sign the convention too failed. The Red Line that marked the Tibet - India border came to be known as the McMahon Line in history.

McMahon was the Indian foreign secretary before he took up the present assignment. Earlier in 1893 as a junior to the then Foreign Secretary Mortimer Durand, McMahon had assisted him in the demarcation of India-Afghanistan border. He found that by giving his name to the line, Durand had immortalised himself. He saw this as his opportunity to go down in history. He now gave his name to the line that he had drawn as the border between India and Tibet. For over a century now both Durand and McMahon have become household names and subject matter of many books.

Be that as it may, no Chinese government ever accepted this line as the frontier and on the contrary called it an illegal one flowing from an unequal treaty. Chinese communists disowned it too. Nehru was

quite aware of it. Yet he went on reiterating that McMahon Line was India's border in the northeast. By virtue of this line areas north of the McMahon Line called by Tibetans 'Tawang' (later India gave it the name of NORTH EAST FRONTIER AGENCY) came to India. There are quite a few twists in the story. The first was when the Simla Convention having put Tawang, the Tibetan name for the area that fell in India under the Simla Convention, the British made no effort to occupy it and left it in Tibetan occupation, who also collected civil revenues. The second twist came in 1940. The British conveyed to Tibet that it would amend the McMahon line to run South of Tawang thus putting it back into Tibet. As it happened the formalities for its reversion to Tibet had not been done by 1947 when the British left India. Tibet was still occupying Tawang, while the map showed it to be in India.

The McMahon Line was not a scientifically drawn line after surveys, as international borders are drawn. We have for this the testimony of Henry McMahon himself. In 1935 he gave a lecture on international borders in London under the auspices of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Art. Referring to this border he said, for lack of local knowledge and want of time, the line was drawn **in "a somewhat general terms"**. If the author of the line himself admitted that it was not drawn after surveys, there was a need to conduct surveys and redraw the line scientifically later to make it a scientific border line.

Let us not quibble on that for a moment and go ahead.

In July 1948 there was yet another twist. Independent India gave assurance to Tibet that while not annexing any part of Tibet, it would be prepared to **'an adjustment on the Indo-Tibetan frontier particularly in the Tawang area'**. This was in line with the decision that the British had conveyed to Lhasa in 1940.

Subsequently in October 1948, the Political Officer from Gangtok reminded the Ministry of External Affairs for early implementation of the assurance given to Tibet on the adjustment of the frontier in Tawang area.

But there was another twist waiting to happen. The 1949 developments on the mainland China appeared ominous. The civil war was coming to conclusion. The victory of the Communist party appeared almost certain. China had threatened to liberate Tibet. While India welcomed Communist victories, it too appeared worried. It was calculated that should China occupy Tibet, which it was likely, it would become not only contiguous neighbour of India for the first time in history but its borders would come down to the plains of Assam creating a sense of disquiet in Delhi, a security dilemma. On 23 May 1951 China and Tibet had signed the 17-Point Agreement which made Tibet formally a part of China. Just before the China-Tibet agreement was signed, India to forestall this development in March-April sent a military detachment and occupied Tawang. Tibet accused India of taking undue advantage of the situation. Their protests were brushed aside. Sumal Sinha, Mission-in-charge in Lhasa had then prophetically warned Delhi that

“Tawang will in future cause uneasiness on our frontier; Tibetans not only refused to reconcile themselves to loss of this territory which they seem to have absentmindedly ceded and never surrendered possession of but also regard present Indian action as both improper and unfair”.

Tibetan too asked Sinha would India be generous enough to the adjustment of the border which it had promised? An embarrassed Sinha unable to answer, asked the Tibetans to take this up with the Political Officer in Gangtok.

As you would see Tawang which was subsequently given the name of North East Frontier Agency came in Indian possession only in 1951, for the first time, notwithstanding the Simla Convention of 1914. China in subsequent years reminded India often of this indiscretion in occupying it and the circumstances in which it occupied. The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was put under the administrative control of the Ministry of External Affairs. Later it was upgraded into a full state calling it Arunachal Pradesh.

As a result of the above discussion two points that emerged are:

(1) That despite the British and Indian assurances to formally amend the map to revert Tawang in Tibet, it was occupied by India and (2) The McMahon Line was not scientifically drawn border.

I would now turn to the frontier in the western sector i.e. Ladakh's border with Aksai Chin. When India became independent in 1947 the border here was marked UNDEFINED on the Indian maps drawn by the Survey of India. It continued to be UNDEFINED until 1954 even when the maps were reprinted in subsequent years. During the talks in January-April 1954 on Tibet agreement better known as Panchsheel Agreement it was decided by India that it would not enter into any discussions on the frontiers during the discussions. The brief that was prepared for discussions in Beijing, Aksai Chin was shown disputed along with some the other disputed areas. However it did not attract any attention. The delegation going to Beijing was directed that it would not enter into any discussions on the borders. The Chinese too did not raise any border question during negotiations and finally the borders were not discussed.

It is relevant to point out, that the correspondence leading to the negotiations was conducted by the prime minister himself with the Chinese Premier Zhou. In his correspondence he referred only to

issues like trade agencies, trade, travel pilgrimage etc., avoiding any mention of frontier question **purposely and consciously**.

Hence no discussions took place on the frontier question. The Panchsheel agreement was signed on 29 April, 1954. Two months later on 1 July 1954 Prime Minister issued instructions that the old maps of the western area where the frontier was **undefined** be withdrawn and replaced with new maps showing the border with a **definite** line and that would be India's border which would not be open for discussion with anyone.

Later it was also decided that in redrawing the border, the most advantageous line be shown as the border. While drawing the new maps and changing the character of this border from **undefined** to **defined** there was a need to consult the other stakeholder which in this case was China. But P.M. issued instructions that border now drawn unilaterally would not be open for discussion with anyone.

Irony is having drawn the line, no action was taken at physical occupation of the area, not even a check-post was set up, or even a flag unfurled as a sign of India's sovereignty in the area.

Nehru, however declared that by not discussing the frontiers, the border between the two countries stood settled. He went on batting on this premise hereafter. It was an erroneous understanding of the prime minister. An agreement settles specific issues which are on the agreed agenda. I am sure, you all know that any agreement has two parts, the preamble and the articles that lay down the methodology to settle the issues listed in the preamble. In the present case the preamble said

**“Being desirous of promoting trade and cultural intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India,**

**and for facilitating pilgrimage and travel by the peoples of China and India”**

As the text of the agreement would show it settled only those issues relevant to trade and travel and pilgrimage only. That by not discussing the frontier question they stood settled was an erroneous understanding of Nehru but he continued to make this claim which China never accepted.

Soon thereafter intrusions by China in the central sector area, which otherwise was quiet, were noticed. They were spread over a vast area. India read each encroachment as an isolated incident and did not see any pattern in them.

Interestingly whenever India talked to China on the frontiers, China always maintained that their maps were of Kuomintang era. They had only reprinted them and for lack of time had not revised them. At no time China gave India any assurance that when revising their maps they would follow the Indian map lines. In 1958 when China informed India that in revising their maps it was necessary to conduct surveys and discuss them with the other stakeholder, Delhi felt disappointed and asked China to accept the Indian maps and draw their maps accordingly without fresh surveys. But China would not accept such a suggestion.

Sir, you all are aware lines on maps separate the geographical and political jurisdiction of countries that lie on either side those lines. They reflect the vagaries and irrationalities of history. They come into being as a result of agreement between stakeholders by adjustment of rival claims, interests and ambitions at points where they adjoin. They are the symbols of sovereignty and imply the limits up to which a government may exercise its political and economic jurisdiction. To that extent, given the sensitivity of the issues, it is essential that the borders are jointly surveyed and drawn to the

satisfaction of both the stakeholders to avoid future disputes. That the Indian borders lacked these features is in brief the initial story of the India-Tibet/China frontiers.

The relevant question now is 'was prime minister himself satisfied with what he had done'. He was a highly educated man known for his sagacity and had wide knowledge of international affairs as reflected in his book **Discovery of India which was published before independence**. In the Interim Cabinet in 1946 he had headed the Foreign Department and therefore was an experienced and knowledgeable person.

On 8, December 1959 Nehru told the Rajya Sabha that he as well as his Ministry had a **lingering doubt about India's stand on the borders and expressed his worry about the future**. Yet he said

**"we should hold our position and the lapse of time and events would confirm it and by the time challenge come, we would be in a much stronger position to face it."**

One is left wondering if it was the right approach. If there was a doubt and that too a lingering doubt the prudent course was to discuss it with the other party and sort out the issue than leaving to an uncertain factor in the future when hopefully India would be strong. There was an opportunity the very next year in April at the time of Nehru-Zhou summit talks. Next year when Zhou came to Delhi, the two prime ministers had held twenty hours of talks spread over five days. Unfortunately the opportunity was not utilised to sort out the doubts. On the contrary Nehru remained as uncompromising as ever and became more rigid than before.

On this very issue, it would be relevant to draw your attention to the statement made by Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt, a couple of



months before Nehru's above statement. On 28 October 1959 Dutt speaking at the annual conference of the governors of the Indian states said:

‘The Sikkim- Tibet boundary delimited in 1896 was the only boundary along the entire frontier which was properly delimited’.

Shorn of verbiage it meant that out of about 3,500 Kms. long India-China border the only demarcated part was 220 Kms. It meant the rest of about 3,000 Kms. still needed delimitation or delineation and demarcation.

Unfortunately it was his rigid and somewhat flawed understanding of the borders that proved the nemesis. He would not enter into discussions with China to find a peaceful settlement by give and take.

In April 1960 at the initiative of Zhou Enlai there were Summit level talks between the two prime ministers. Nehru while sticking to India's claims on both the sectors, did not even agree to Zhou's earlier suggestion which he repeated **since our borders were never surveyed and delineated, as modern states there was a need to undertake this exercise and establish scientific borders which would be acceptable to both the sides**. Nehru did not feel the need for it and repeated that even if the borders were not delineated or demarcated yet they were well known by usage and custom or by the application of the principle of watersheds. Zhou in his conversations with various leaders like Vice President, Home and Finance ministers, gave clear indication that since the Eastern sector was already under Indian occupation, China would accept it, (the McMahon line) but India too must consider China's claim to the western sector which was already in its possession since long. Zhou Enlai insisted that China had even used the Aksai Chin route in 1950

and had since been using it to send supplies to Tibet and even had constructed the road there and India was unaware. Zhou's offer was that in exchange for China's recognition of India's claim in the eastern sector i.e. the McMahon Line, which had economic value, India should accept its claim to the western sector where India had no presence. Nehru had later admitted that the western sector was an uninhabited area where there were no trees and not even a blade of grass grew. It too had no economic value either.

Unfortunately India's claim in the western sector did not rest on sustainable evidence. Nehru said that when he had gone to for tracking sometime 44 years ago which would be in 1916, (I repeat 1916), (He said this in 1960) he had not seen any Chinese there and again when he flew over the area in 1954 he did not see any of them either. This was hardly a valid evidence to claim any territory. Was it any wonder that he did not see any Chinese? He himself had said later that the area was uninhabitable where not a blade of grass grew. Naturally such an area would not attract habitation and would be empty of human life. It raised the counter question did he see any Indian?

The talks between the two prime ministers despite their talking for almost 20 hours did not produce any results.

Let us go back to 1957. China had completed the construction of a road through the Aksai Chin and had announced its completion. India did not know about it until Chinese announced it in 1957. Foreign Secretary had given a note about the road, to the Chinese Ambassador in Delhi. For inexplicable reasons instead of a protest note since it was about the road constructed in an Indian claimed area, the note was marked **INFORMAL**, which conveyed that India was not seriously concerned at the road constructed by the Chinese. More than that the note as worded exposed Indian naiveté since it said that China not only did not take Indian permission to construct

the road but did not even ask for visa for the workers deployed on the road construction. What was most unfortunate was, in the same note, India asked China for help in locating an Indian patrol party which had gone missing in the area, India claimed. On 3 November 1959 China confirmed to Delhi that it had indeed located and arrested a group of armed Indians on Sinkiang-Tibet road in Chinese territory conducting unlawful surveys. Indian reply hurt Indian interests further. The reply said that the question whether this particular area was Indian or Chinese territory was a matter of dispute which was to be dealt with separately. It was evident that India was not aware about its ownership. It was not a small road. It was a 1200 km long road out of which 120 km fell in the Aksai Chin area and employed over 3000 workers during construction. Aksai Chin itself was a swathe of territory about 5,180 square kms., and it was a link to Tibet for China. Later when the Indian Charge d'affaires Premendu Kumar Banerjee protested to Premier Zhou that China had constructed a road in Indian territory he shot back to ask 'China took several years to construct this road; if it was Indian territory where were the Indians when the road was being constructed?' Banerjee had no reply.

Apparently Nehru was not much concerned about China having constructed the road, since in his letter of 14 December 1958 to Zhou made no mention of this road having been constructed in Indian claimed territory. He only discussed the eastern frontier, i.e., McMahon Line.

As it happened the people of India were not aware of the controversies that were being discussed. Nehru's own stress had remained on the eastern sector or the McMahon Line. It was left to Zhou to question the boundary in both the sectors. He pointed out to Nehru in his letter of 23 January, 1959 that 'historically no treaty or agreement on the Sino-Indian boundary has ever been concluded

between the Chinese central government and the Government of India. He also said the boundary between them had not yet been delimited and there was the need to do so now. But Nehru stuck to the same old line that even if the borders were not delineated these were well known by usage and custom, which he had been maintaining since 1950. Zhou again stressed the need for rationally defined borders in terms of latitude and longitude which had never been done. Zhou also tried to meet Nehru's apprehensions on the McMahon Line suggesting that China had never crossed it despite not recognising it. Since China had recognised the McMahon Line in the case of Burma, the problem could be solved in the case of India too. It was a clear indication that China was open to accepting the McMahon Line in favour of India.

Nehru said in Parliament on 8 August 1959 "in all this area there is no actual demarcation. He insisted our maps were clear that the area was within Indian territory but it was a fact that a part of Ladakh is broadly covered by the wide sweep of their maps. Note the contradictions in the statement.

In 1959 the revolt in Tibet had peaked and Dalai Lama had fled Lhasa and taken refuge in India. This provided another reason for the relations to deteriorate further. The Prime Minister met the Dalai Lama in Mussoorie, where he was staying initially. He asked PM for help in getting Tibet its independence. PM told him categorically that India could not go to war with China and that

**" the whole world cannot bring freedom to Tibet unless whole fabric of the Chinese state is destroyed.."**

At his press conference on 5 April, 1959 to Nehru's embarrassment, a journalist pointed out to him that the Communist party of India's mouth piece "**New Age**" had accused the Indian officials for

colluding with the revolt and even named the Political Officer in Sikkim, Apa Pant in this connection. An upset Nehru replied that he found in them

“a certain lack of balance of mind and total absence of feeling of decency and nationality. What they are I don't know. They cease to be Indians if they talk like this way”.

Later on 29 April 1960 after the failure of Summit talks, he faced intense criticism in Parliament particularly on his policy of nonalignment. Losing his cool he chided the members for their brave words which had little meaning and said this kind of ‘things may well be said at the Ramlila Ground or Gandhi Grounds in Delhi’.

When all these discussions and confabulations did not lead to any settlement, the public mind was too agitated. The public which had been fed on the staple of *Hindi—China Bhai Bhai* started suspecting that all was not well in the bilateral domain between the two countries. China was then presented as a villain who had deceptively usurped Indian territory and had also killed Indian policemen at Kongka pass. It was a rude shock for the people that a country which until then they had believed to be India's best friend, had now acted treacherously. Public opinion hardened against showing any accommodation to China. In the face of public outcry, Nehru too suffered loss of face. The Cabinet too suffered the same fate and was not prepared to let Nehru compromise on the position he had taken until then. Nehru found his back to the wall and his options restricted. Any accommodation to China now was like a political hara-kiri. There was a divide in the Congress party.

As already stated India after drawing a unilateral line along the Aksai Chin-Ladakh border took no steps to announce its presence in

the area and allowed a vacuum to develop. Nature hates vacuum and has the tendency to fill up and it was indeed filled up by Chinese.

There were senior ICS officials in the top hierarchy of the Ministry of External Affairs, advising the Prime minister. They apparently found the personality of the prime minister too daunting to advise him. The ministry suffered from the 'Pandit Jee knows best' syndrome. Jagat Mehta who was involved in the problem before, during and after the 1960 talks, and finally rose to be the Foreign Secretary described Nehru as:

“The greatest democratic dictator in history, and his time as prime ministership were largely wasted...”

He however conceded that if an officer stood his ground Nehru was willing to change his own position in pursuit of national interest but “His bark was frightening”.

It would be relevant to point out that Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad had said something similar to say about him in his book INDIA WINS FREEDOM. Nehru had addressed a press conference in 1946 on the Cabinet Mission Plan for the political settlement of India. His answers to the questions were such that the Muslim League which had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, reneged from it. An upset Maulana, who had spearheaded the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission said:

**“His nature is such that he often acts on impulse. As a rule he is open to persuasion but sometimes he makes up his mind without taking all the facts into consideration. Once he had made up his mind he tends to go ahead regardless of what the consequences may be.**

The border problem was the natural outcome his policy to keep all the differences with China particularly those relating to the border question hidden from the people. This resulted in an uninformed public falling prey to what was dished out to them by the official media and allowed wrong perceptions to grow in their mind, which continue to rule them even now.

Still going back to 1956, it would be instructive to point out another relevant fact. Burma too had some problem on its common border with China. The Burmese Prime Minister U Nu had consulted Nehru and he advised him to go to China and settle the problem by give and take. He particularly advised him not to take a rigid position since rigidity hardens positions and makes problems insoluble. U Nu used his advice effectively and sorted out his country's border problem. He later told Nehru that he had used his advice effectively and made an agreement with China.

Fast forward to 16 January 1962. U Nu was in Varanasi on a pilgrimage. Nehru met him there. Now it was U Nu's turn to give Nehru the same advice he had given him in 1956. Nu advised Nehru to go to Beijing and solve the problem by give and take particularly since both Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi were very anxious to resolve the issue. He also added that Zhou had been to India already three times and now you should go. But Nehru ignored what U Nu said. Even Khrushchev in 1959 had similarly advised and had said that a tranquil border was more important than a piece of territory. He gave the example of his own country and said that Iran had a claim on some Soviet territory. For the sake of tranquil border, we conceded Iranian claim and returned that territory and now there was tranquillity on the borders.

You know all what happened after this.

Unfortunately, it was Nehru's rigid and somewhat flawed understanding of the issues that proved the nemesis. He would neither before the war enter into discussions with China to find a peaceful settlement nor after the war. Six nonaligned countries had met in a Conference in Colombo. They had made some proposals to help the two countries to come to the negotiating table to negotiate a settlement. India did not utilise the opportunity as the starting point. It is true India had accepted the proposals in toto and China in principle. Nehru refused to talk unless China too accepted them in toto.

These proposals were a starting point. The Colombo conference proposals were neither the arbitrators' award nor a prescription providing a final settlement. They were merely the starting point for discussions. Later too there were a couple of occasions when a beginning towards negotiations could have been made but India's rigid stand did not help. After Nehru's death his point of view got etched in stone and no prime minister could deviate from it. For most part it were the Congress Ministries in office and naturally for any one of them to deviate from Nehru's stand was blasphemous and would amount to irreverence. China did provide the opportunity but India's reaction remained rigid. As you know the war had ended in a total disaster for India. The differences on the boundary question have since remained as wide as ever. Senior officials of both the countries have been meeting periodically. The Special Representatives on the boundary question have met 22 times since 2003, the last time being in December 2019. They are high level official. At present Indian Special Representative is National Security Advisor who has a cabinet rank and Chinese representative is Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister and State Councillor. After the recent standoff External Affairs Minister Jaishankar has met the Chinese



Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Moscow on the sidelines of the Ministerial Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) but with little result. Even now after the recent standoff there is stalemate towards restoring status quo ante.

Every body talk of Line of Actual Control. But what is this LAC. Nobody knows. At the end of the war Nehru did not agree to Premier Zhou's proposal for an agreed demilitarised zone along the border as it then existed. If it was drawn that would have been a real Line of Actual Control. The result is that there is no line of control either on the ground, on any map or even on a piece of paper. It is each country's perception of the territory it was occupying as the war ended.

With that i end my presentation and thank you all for your patience.

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