

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### Close but no cigar

*The Sino-Indian talks showed that both sides want a restoration of relations, but the tenacious border dispute is still not solved.*

The fourth round of Sino-Indian talks concluded on Oct. 30 with cautious optimism in both camps and a decision to convene the next round of talks in Peking next year. Although some Indian commentators heralded the talks as the beginning of a major "breakthrough" in Sino-Indian relations, the consensus in New Delhi is more restrained.

The talks, which were scheduled to be finished on Oct. 29, were extended for a day with the hope of agreeing to a set of principles on how to solve the border dispute that is at the core of the problem between the two nations. Negotiations are stalemated on China's insistence on a "comprehensive" solution to the border dispute as opposed to India's desire for a "sector-by-sector" approach. This time, both sides agreed to "marry" the distinct sets of negotiating principles presented by each side.

The Chinese delegation was led by Vice-Foreign Minister Gong Dafei, and for India by K. S. Bajpai, secretary in the external affairs ministry and a former ambassador to China who has just been named the next Indian ambassador to the United States.

Although progress in the procedural approach to further negotiations was given much publicity, the two nations also agreed to pursue other avenues of cooperation: exchanges in the area of science and technology, an exchange of academics and journalists, and an agreement to learn from each

other's experience and expertise in the field of agriculture.

While the hard part of the negotiations is still ahead, there is no question that the New Delhi talks marked a successful outcome of the past three years of accelerated diplomatic exchanges between the two nations, a process initiated by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In 1976, 14 years after China invaded India and the two nations were plunged into war over a piece of barren mountainous territory, Mrs. Gandhi's initiatives resulted in re-establishing diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. In 1977, the Chinese sent Ambassador Chen Chaoyuan to New Delhi.

In 1980, after Mrs. Gandhi returned to power, the Indian prime minister met Huang Hua, then foreign minister of China, in Salisbury, Zimbabwe. A month later, Mrs. Gandhi had a long meeting with Hua Gofeng, the Chinese Communist Party chairman, while both were in Belgrade for Tito's funeral. On June 26, 1981, Huang Jua visited New Delhi. Since then, four rounds of talks between the two nations have taken place, and it is apparent that both nations are working seriously toward a long-term normalization of relations.

There are many reasons why China would want to establish relations with India. The most straightforward is that Peking, eager to break out of its isolation and to position herself at an equidistance from both superpowers,

wants to join the mainstream of the Non-Aligned movement.

Also significant, no doubt, is the Soviet factor. Ever since the Sino-Soviet split, the name of the Soviet game has been to contain China.

The Soviets welcomed a strong India and made vigorous efforts to ensure that India would have no strong independent

Soviets have seized every opportunity to impress upon India that China is an irretrievably dangerous force which is interested only in gobbling up the entire continent.

Since 1971, when India and the Soviet Union signed a friendship treaty, China, on the other hand, has spared no effort to make it clear that it considered India a mere satrapy of the Russians. India's "dancing to the Soviet tune" on issues considered vital to Soviet interests, made China suspicious if not outright hostile.

But Mrs. Gandhi has forced Chinese leaders to take another look by her own persistent initiatives to restore relations as well as in her articulation of India's response to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979.

Even so, China's compulsion to test India's patience is plain. Only a few days before the New Delhi talks were scheduled to start, China announced her intention to hold border talks with Bhutan. Although Bhutan is a sovereign state, according to a bilateral treaty signed with India in 1949, the mountain kingdom's foreign policy is guided by the Indian government. The recent dramatic stopover of convenience in troubled Sri Lanka by a delegation of Chinese officials on the way to the Maldives was a similarly calculated testing maneuver. In the past, either would have been sufficient to break off discussions, but so far, India's patience is holding firm.