

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### The coming diplomatic breakthrough

*The diplomatic crescendo between the two reflects the shifting strategic geometry in the Asia-Pacific region.*

A visit to Beijing by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi—the first for an Indian prime minister in 34 years—is anticipated later this year to mark a breakthrough in India-China relations that has been in preparation for more than a year. The interest of both India and China to transform bilateral relations, moribund since the Chinese invasion of India in 1962, is a dramatic measure of the changing strategic geometry of the region, where the Soviet-China and China-India equations will tend to fill much of the vacuum left by a retreating U.S. presence.

In the past several months, the process of upgrading relations has involved a veritable parade of political, business, and government delegations to Beijing. In the latest high-level political contacts, Indian Speaker of the Parliament Balram Jhakar and Secretary General of the Parliament Dr. Kashyap met with their counterparts July 6.

Chairman of China's National People's Assembly Wan Li reiterated the message given to all Indian guests: "China sincerely hopes to develop its good neighborly relations with India on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, which were formulated by the two of them"—a reference to the heady days of India-China friendship during the 1950s under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou Enlai. (It is worth recalling that at that time India and China cooperated to convene the Bandung conference of newly independent nations, the precursor of the Non-Aligned Movement, in the teeth of opposition from the Soviet Comintern apparatus and the John Foster Dulles State De-

partment alike.)

Wan Li also told the Indians that their boundary dispute—the chief stumbling block to improved relations, made all the more bitter and seemingly intractable by the war and Chinese occupation of large tracts of sensitive Indian territory—would not be difficult to resolve with patient negotiations in light of mutual understanding and accommodation. Indeed, Rajiv Gandhi signaled in a June 11 speech in Budapest that the logjam had been broken. Gandhi said India favored a settlement "which takes into account the national interests of both sides"—which contrasts with India's position, through eight rounds of "border talks," that a legitimate border already exists.

This followed brief visits to Beijing by Indian Defense Minister K.C. Pant and then-Finance Minister N.D. Tiwari, and the announcement thereafter that Gandhi had accepted the Chinese invitation.

Prior to the recent parliamentary tour, delegations from Congress (I) and from both the CPI and CPI-M communist parties—the latter led by West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu—made the pilgrimage to Beijing. While Basu conferred privately with Gandhi before and after his talks with the Chinese Communist leadership, CPI-M Politburo member Harkishan Singh Surjeet took to the bullhorn, announcing that reports of Chinese aid to anti-national movements in India's Northeast, and of Chinese arms sales to Iran, were "false."

Most of the Indian visitors to China have been struck by its economic endeavor, and impressed with the poten-

tial for cooperation and trade. In early June, Chinese Communist Party chief Zhao Ziyang expressed the hope that India and China would share their experiences in efforts to raise food production, create more jobs, and increase rural income. China aims at 500 million tons food production, 200 million more jobs, and per capita rural income of \$1,000 by the turn of the century, Zhao told an international seminar on "China and the World in the Nineties."

Among the 18 foreign participants in the Beijing seminar was the noted Indian agronomist, former head of the International Rice Research Institute in Manila, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. India and China share some of the same problems, Zhao told Swaminathan, and praised India's progress in agriculture.

Later in June, an 18-member delegation of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry was told by ministers and other Chinese officials that China was anxious to expand trade and establish joint ventures with India. A lengthy list of raw materials and basic industrial products was identified for export from India, and a slightly shorter list mostly of raw materials identified for import from China. There are rumors that India may be interested in shifting its purchases of high-grade coal to China since Australia can no longer meet requirements.

India has stated its interest in broadening relations in a number of areas, as a means to create an atmosphere for settling the knotty border issue and clinching a breakthrough in relations at the highest political level. On May 28 the first-ever bilateral cultural pact was signed, and a bilateral economic team met again in early June and concluded an agreement to resume border trade across Tibet.