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**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair
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CU-SCB/2026-27/OP-005

OCCASIONAL PAPER

Engaging China in a Reconfiguring World Order

VIJAY NAMBIAR

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations
Chanakya University, Bengaluru**

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Engaging China in a Reconfiguring World Order

by

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Disclaimer

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It is a pleasure and a privilege to speak at the first Chanakya Forum devoted specifically to China. Thank you for inviting me. The choice of Chanakya as the intellectual inspiration for this forum is particularly appropriate. Chanakya understood something that remains fundamental to international politics: that relations between states cannot be understood through sentiment alone. They must be understood through the interaction of power, interest, calculation, vulnerability and strategy. But Chanakya also understood that statecraft is not simply about accumulating power. It is about using power to secure an enduring order. That distinction is particularly relevant to the subject before us today.

Introduction

Let me begin with an obvious but important observation. We live today in a world no longer defined by unipolar certainty. Nor are we yet in a fully formed multipolar system. Instead, we are in a more complex phase best described as an emerging world of managed bipolarity with fragmented multipolar effects beneath it.

Even though this 21st century version of a Gramscian interregnum is characterised by some “morbid symptoms” and “monsters”, the basic truth is that the United States and China today are no longer engaged in unstructured rivalry. Their relationship is increasingly characterised by “managed competition”, described often as a form of “cold peace”. While competing intensely, they also recognise fully the costs of uncontrolled escalation and are building a stabilised framework of coexistence within their competition. This is a critical shift having deep implications for countries like India. In such a system, rules are not set through open contestation. They are shaped by implicit coordination between the two top players and its evolving structure forms the backdrop for all other strategic dynamics.

Even without a formal G2, the combined gravitational pull of the US and China is increasingly shaping global outcomes and will tend to: narrow agenda-setting space for other actors, constrain crisis diplomacy options, and reduce middle-power leverage in shaping rules. Leadership is increasingly concentrated at the top, even as the wider system appears fragmented. At the US-China Summit later this month, one of the most consequential outcomes is likely to be a framework understanding on AI regulation, risk management and control affecting frontier models, military application covering especially WMDs, cyberattacks and AI-proliferation to non-state actors. While the technological rivalry between the US and China will remain intense, both clearly recognise that unmanaged AI competition will become a source of strategic instability. But strategic agency will be filtered through the equilibrium management of the two largest powers. For India, the challenge will be to avoid a reactive role and seek a way to become formative in shaping that equilibrium.

Within India, especially at the popular level, China's foreign policy approach is perceived in stereotypical terms as purely assertive or episodically coercive. In the process, we often fail to appreciate that China's strategy is more patient and structural. Rather than seeking immediate dominance through confrontation, China is engaged in long-horizon accumulation of influence. This happens through economic dependencies, technological ecosystems, supply chain positioning, and diplomatic networks. Such power rarely appears as crisis. China embeds itself quietly into systems others depend on. Over time, it creates structural asymmetries that are difficult to reverse. Whether or not the grander Chinese design of a “Beijing Consensus” (Prof Kondapalli spoke of it recently as encompassing a successful BRI, the four Global Initiatives, New Quality Innovative Productive Forces, Dual Circulation and a fully internationalised RMB)¹ whether or not this will be realisable within the foreseeable future is something I shall not pronounce upon but even a work-in-progress will provide huge stresses for countries like India inasmuch as this strategy is operating within an environment where the whimsical actions of the US under Trump are eroding its own international credibility. For us, the challenge from China is not only border tensions or



episodic crises. It will be the gradual embedding of dependence across critical sectors of the global economy and technology landscape, often unfolding beneath surface stability.

Meanwhile, just as China represents one pillar of structural accumulation, the United States remains the other indispensable pillar. Its strategic behaviour is also changing. US foreign policy is becoming more transactional, domestically constrained, and episodic. Even in Asia, engagement is often driven by crises rather than sustained strategy. This does not reduce US centrality. But it does change the nature of external balancing for other states. For India, it introduces greater uncertainty in alignment and support options.

The US is not withdrawing from Asia but its commitments are increasingly shaped by domestic political cycles and burden-sharing debates. As a result, partnerships are seen as conditional and evolving, not as fixed guarantees. This leads to a broader conclusion. External alignment cannot substitute for internal capability development and strategic autonomy. Alignments themselves become fluid rather than binary. This increases flexibility, but it reduces clarity of guarantees. For India, this is both an opportunity and a constraint.

India–China Relationship: From Bilateral Dispute to Structural Competition

For much of the post-Cold War period, especially since the historic Rajiv Gandhi visit to China of December 1988 while there were major differences between the two countries especially on the boundary question, there was also much optimism that the development of all-round relations between the two countries based on trust and cooperation and a strategic partnership between the governments and flourishing people-to-people ties would benefit both countries and the world. Both sides also discussed ways to stabilize the situation in the border areas through a series of peace and tranquillity and confidence building agreements (in 1988, 1993, 1996, and 2005) that were meant to reduce the possibility of future military conflict between India and China. Since 2007, however, China's attitude began to shift and as the economic gap between the two countries increasingly widened and China's own diplomatic heft increased, Beijing became more brazen in infrastructure construction and patrolling activity on the boundary, more public in obstructing Indian patrols and in denying them access in perceived disputed areas thus leading to a series of new flareups in the Depsang, Demchok and Chumar, the deadlock over Doklam, culminating in the Galwan attacks in June 2020.

The events since 2020 changed irretrievably the psychological and strategic context of the India–China relationship. The biggest casualty was the complete breakdown of trust. Looking ahead, therefore, India must now continuously fortify its military position along the frontier. New agreements may well be needed to upgrade the 1993 and 1996 Agreements to take account of the new ground situation created by the deployment of forces, armaments, and technologies on the ground by China over the past years and the countermeasures now being put in place by India to strengthen infrastructure, build tunnels, lateral roads and airfields

to support rapid deployment of forces in emergencies as well as enhanced surveillance, and reconnaissance through space-based, over-the-horizon, and other means. In today's conditions, crises rarely begin with clear intent. They emerge from ambiguity, tactical encounters, and incremental responses that are then amplified by domestic pressures and strategic mistrust. The danger is not necessarily deliberate escalation, but reciprocal misinterpretation under conditions of heightened sensitivity. This makes two requirements essential: credible deterrence and reliable communication. One without the other is insufficient.

The latest round of Special Representatives talks in Beijing last month have evoked much positive vibes all around. Apart from announcing an 8-Point Consensus to stabilise Peace and Tranquillity on the LAC, reestablish high level communication channels and acknowledging the strategic direction of the top leadership on both sides, two points on border delimitation appear striking: a) the agreement to continue talks based on the 2005 political parameters and guiding principles and b) the reference to “early and substantial harvest” on boundary delimitation and border management. While specific sectors were not mentioned, it is presumed to refer to Sikkim and Middle Sectors with no reference to a “package” covering all sectors. Strikingly though, previous references to “areas where conditions are ripe” or “favourable locations” do not appear this time, instead there is reference to “comprehensive solution.” In place of clarifying lines on maps, they opt instead for “operational mechanisms” to handle differing ground perceptions. While one may argue these are welcome signs and any such parleys must inevitably reach “crunch time”, there also appear some causes for concern, even suspicion in light of the continuous public narrative campaigns being conducted by China, to which I shall refer next.

I refer first of all to China's narrative building and political versions of “salami slicing” claims over Arunachal. These appear to me to be part of a longer term Chinese objective of effectively backtracking on their “settled populations” commitment made to India in 2005. Indeed, the designation of this area as Zang nan and progressive attempts through renaming places, issuing maps, objecting to visits by Indian leaders, building villages and infrastructure and introducing Chinese terminology into international discourse are, to my mind part of a larger plan to alter the strategic geometry of the entire Himalayan and sub-Himalayan region across the arc from Shaksam to Arunachal . The Three-Step Roadmap proposed by China to Bhutan seeks to pressure the Himalayan kingdom towards a “definitive positioning” on issues of central strategic concern for India in the western sector most notably the Doklam area overlooking the approaches to the Siliguri Corridor. With Nepal, the China goal seem to be to transform that territory from a buffer to a trans-Himalayan interface. Thus far Nepal's primary preoccupation has been directed southward to building its economic space towards India. With Bangladesh too, the Chinese objective appears to be directed at the strategic compression of India in this area by changing its geopolitical environment. The objective may not necessarily be to set up Chinese military bases in Bangladesh but rather build infrastructure, technology, investment, ports and political relationships that can themselves slowly alter the balance of strategic influence. Further westward, Pakistan has remained the most developed element of this wider Chinese strategic geometry. CPEC and the long-standing China-Pakistan strategic relationship has given Beijing a western anchor extending



from Xinjiang through Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. The 2020 Ladakh crisis demonstrated for India the importance of thinking about China's western theatre and the India-Pakistan theatre together rather than as entirely separate compartments.

Any effort by India to counter this challenge must involve serious outreach towards these neighbours, namely Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, and directed towards the following medium-term objectives:

First: Protecting the chokepoint—Siliguri. India should treat the Siliguri Corridor as part of a larger network rather than one vulnerable narrow strip. The answer is to build redundancy through multiple, protected rail connections; alternative road routes; air mobility; riverine connectivity; alternate multi modal transit routes; digital redundancy; and energy redundancy. The recent Indian move to establish a new triangular security grid around the Siliguri area reflects precisely the growing recognition that the corridor must be considered in relation to Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh simultaneously.

Second: Not treating neighbours as buffers. India's earlier strategic instinct that has often treated Nepal and Bhutan as buffers will need to change. Nor can we expect to tell our neighbours not to deal with China. That is neither realistic nor politically sustainable. In its place India must help create a shared strategic ecosystem based on: economic opportunity; cross-border infrastructure; electricity grids; digital integration; education; health; tourism; disaster management; and climate resilience. But the recent tragedy caused by Nepal's Langtang Lirung north slope collapse also showed us how major infrastructure can interact with fragile natural systems to produce high impact cascading events of incredibly destructive magnitude. While such challenges could re-emerge anywhere along the Himalayan system, we will need most urgently to identify critical locations where we must work credibly with our neighbours to strengthen cross-border science and data as well as build pre-agreed protocols and mechanisms for tackling crises and building resilience through existing natural connections with India. Inevitably, considering the ramifications of China's proposed megadam over the Yarlung Zangpo in Medog, such efforts must necessarily also involve China.

Third: Distinguishing autonomy from alignment. India must accept that Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh will seek diversified relationships. Their autonomy is not necessarily hostility towards India. Indeed, attempting to prevent them from exercising autonomy may inadvertently make Chinese alternatives more attractive. The objective should therefore be: not exclusivity, but strategic compatibility. India does not need every neighbour to choose India over China in every sector. It needs to ensure that no neighbour's relationship with China produces a strategic arrangement directly prejudicial to Indian security. That would be a much more realistic doctrine.

Fourth: Connecting Himalayan strategy with maritime strategy. China is seeking influence across the continental and maritime periphery of South Asia. China should understand that attempts to impose unilateral strategic pressure in the Himalayas occur within a wider Asian strategic relationship.

India's response must similarly be geometric rather than linear. We cannot merely defend the frontier. We have to shape the strategic space behind, beside and beyond the frontier. India

must therefore connect:

- Himalayan security,
- the Bay of Bengal,
- the Indian Ocean,
- and Indo-Pacific partnerships.

This could create some degree of Indian counter-leverage.

However, having said this, we cannot remain oblivious to ground realities. What we must recognise is that, at its core India is a systemically significant power, but with uneven and still developing capabilities. The gap with China remains huge. China is not only our largest trading partner, technological competitor and military challenger, it also remains a permanent member of the UN Security Council; a major power in the Indian Ocean; an important factor in the Global South; and a civilisational state with a distinctive conception of its own place in history. China's strength derives from the interaction of its manufacturing capacity, infrastructure, technology, finance, military capability, state institutions, diplomatic networks and enormous domestic market. This is why coping with China in a purely military response will never be sufficient. The real competition is increasingly taking place across several domains simultaneously. It is a competition over: technology, standards, supply chains, connectivity, data, manufacturing, finance, infrastructure, maritime access, institutions and strategic narratives. The military dimension is crucial. But it is only the sharpest edge of a much larger strategic instrument.

To add to the complication, our immediate security environment is also shaped by the deepening China–Pakistan relationship. This is no longer a conventional bilateral partnership. It has evolved into a more integrated operational relationship involving intelligence sharing, military coordination, and technology-enabled support. It is also embedded within the broader system of managed bipolarity and interdependence. As a result, India faces a networked security challenge, not a purely bilateral one. Risks are interconnected across domains and actors. This requires a shift in approach. Traditional deterrence is not enough. India needs integrated, multi-domain, system-aware security planning.

So, today the question we face is not just: How do we deal with China? It is: What kind of relationship with China will permit India to protect its interests, preserve strategic autonomy, contribute to Asian stability and, at the same time, help shape the emerging international order? India–China relations have now entered a fundamentally different phase. The old vocabulary of cooperation and competition is no longer sufficient. Nor is the vocabulary of confrontation adequate. We need to speak of managed strategic competition, accompanied by a degree of armed coexistence. This is an uncomfortable formulation. But uncomfortable realities are often the ones that require the greatest clarity.

No country needs to invade another to alter its strategic behaviour. It can use a wide variety of economic or diplomatic, military signalling, technological leverage or even information operations to secure its goals. The purpose may be to persuade the other side that the cost



of resistance is greater than the cost of accommodation. If every Chinese coercive action is answered as though it were preparation for war, escalation becomes almost automatic. But if coercion is tolerated, its cumulative effect may progressively alter the strategic balance. The answer therefore cannot be either permanent escalation or passive accommodation. Our objective should be to make coercion ineffective without making conflict inevitable. That, in my view, is one of the central principles that should guide India's China policy.

In recent conversations, the Chinese have been speaking of “strategic mutual trust” (zhanlue huxin) but their interpretation of its meaning seems different from how the Indian side understands it. China interprets the term from the standpoint of global containment strategies against its rise and compartmentalisation of border and economic issues, India views it mainly from the perspective of border security and parity.

Resilience as Strategy

Ultimately, for India, if the most important long-term response to China cannot be confrontation, it must be Resilience. Strategic resilience must mean that India should be able to absorb pressure without allowing pressure in one domain to determine its behaviour in another. Such Resilience must be all-embracing and complete.

If a border dispute produces economic vulnerability, our strategy is incomplete.

If technological dependence can be converted into political leverage, our strategy is incomplete.

If supply-chain disruption can paralyse critical sectors, our strategy is incomplete.

If military pressure can overwhelm our infrastructure, our strategy is incomplete.

And if diplomatic pressure can isolate us from our partners, our strategy is incomplete.

This is why India's economic transformation is itself a strategic project. Whether it is Manufacturing; Semiconductor capability; Digital infrastructure; Space capability; Artificial intelligence and quantum technologies; or even the ability to provide employment and opportunity to our young population. All these are ultimately national security issues.

Resilience must, therefore, require a whole-of-nation approach. It requires: economic strength, technological capability, military preparedness, energy security, food security, infrastructure, institutional capacity, social cohesion and diplomatic reach. It must also mean reaching out to our opposition parties to build a stable basic domestic consensus. This is not something unusual. It has been done at critical moments in our past history, including during the Rajiv Gandhi visit to China in 1988. It was done by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Whether the current political environment will admit of such a conversation or not is questionable but there is little doubt in my mind that it needs to be done, even if it may need to be kept outside the immediate glare of public attention. A country that is internally resilient is hard to coerce externally. One that is brittle is easier to target.

De-risking, Not Decoupling

Meanwhile, complete decoupling from China is neither realistic nor necessarily desirable. China is deeply integrated into global manufacturing and supply chains. India will continue to trade with China. Our objective should instead be to identify areas where dependence creates unacceptable strategic vulnerability and progressively diversify those dependencies. This means a differentiated approach. The appropriate response is not blanket disengagement but selective resilience. Where dependence is strategically dangerous, we must diversify.

All this calls for a very sophisticated grounding of policy with daily reality across the country and, as is becoming increasingly obvious, such a policy is very difficult to actually put into practice. How serious are we about derisking from China? In a recent book chapter, Santosh Pai has demonstrated that, since 2020, such a policy has simply not worked. In fact, import dependence and asymmetry vis-à-vis China have increased. Supply chains have swiftly adapted and new routes of transshipment have emerged. After 2020, when India rolled out trade measures, many Chinese firms responded not by leaving the Indian market but by expanding production elsewhere in Asia and continuing to serve Indian demand from outside India. Now, with President Xi Jinping's very visible presence at the BRICS summit in New Delhi this month, the symbolism has extended beyond diplomacy. His presence coincides with the strongest revival of Chinese-linked investment flows into India since the tightening of restrictions in 2020. The US\$500 million that has already entered under the revised framework is modest compared with India's overall investment needs. But it is an early indicator of direction. India and China appear to be moving towards a selective engagement framework that includes establishing special economic zones with easier sea route access and Chinese-funded export processing zones within India. In exchange, New Delhi is demanding predictable access to critical raw materials and technology. Pai strongly feels that India's potential leverage over China lies embedded in the imperative that Chinese firms need market share in India to realise their global ambitions.² But we need to continuously ask the question: Is this genuine derisking and building up of resilience?



Connecting Himalayan Strategy with Maritime Strategy

Now, China's economic rise has produced enormous maritime interests. Its dependence on sea lanes, its commercial presence across the Indian Ocean, its naval expansion and its growing network of ports and partnerships have changed the strategic environment. India cannot regard the Indian Ocean as a secondary theatre. It is central to India's geography, economy and strategic identity. But India's objective should not be to turn the Indian Ocean into an arena of permanent confrontation with China. India's advantage lies partly in its geography. But geography becomes strategic power only when combined with capability, partnerships and credibility. India needs a maritime strategy that combines:

- naval capability;
- maritime domain awareness;
- island and coastal infrastructure;
- relationships with Indian Ocean states;
- humanitarian assistance and disaster relief;
- secure economic, digital, satellite and undersea cable connectivity;
- and partnerships with countries that share an interest in an open and stable maritime order.

It is in this context that our Great Nicobar mega-infrastructure initiative aimed at transforming India's southernmost Island into a major strategic, military, and economic transshipment hub is relevant. Predictably, the project will attract major controversy for threatening a pristine biosphere reserve, causing potential environmental damage, biodiversity loss and disaster vulnerability but these issues will have to be patiently negotiated. The Indian Ocean should not become a theatre of exclusive blocs. It should remain an open strategic space in which India plays a leading role.

Wider Strategic Environment

Clearly, our China policy cannot be separated from our broader relationships with the United States, Europe, Russia, Japan, ASEAN and the Global South. Here again, we cannot be seen to be reducing Indian foreign policy to a search for platforms directed against China. India's hosting of the G20 as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summits over the past years as well as the most recent BRICS summit are illustrative of an appreciation of this reality. That an agreed declaration was announced last week was itself a major achievement. Within the BRICS grouping, India has decisively positioned itself as a counterweight against multilateral initiatives from dirigiste and state controlled systems and sought to prevent the Global South from moving entirely away from the post-WWII international order but rather to radically reform it. New Delhi has steadfastly worked against a vision of the BRICS as an anti-Western coalition.

Meanwhile, India cooperates with the United States in technology and defence while retaining independent positions on issues where our interests differ. We are deepening relations with Europe without becoming part of any geopolitical bloc. At the same time we retain channels with Russia and expand our partnerships in Central Asia. While the fate of the Quad may temporarily be under some question, this direction continues to be pursued while simultaneously deepening bilateral and trilateral engagement with Japan and Australia as well as with a range of ASEAN countries and maintaining an autonomous conception of our role in Asia. With Europe too, following the finalisation of a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, we have an opportunity to build stronger ties around technology; manufacturing; clean energy; critical minerals; connectivity; defence; research; artificial intelligence; and resilient supply chains. Irrespective of any China-related derisking linkage, such a partnership will enlarge our choices and create greater strategic resilience for both India and Europe.

But, while strategic flexibility may be increasingly valuable in a world that is moving away from a single-centre order and we may try to sell this to our own population, our degree of success in carrying this off with individual states will depend on the strength and credibility of our leadership and our ability to withstand pressures from the more powerful states. We will inevitably need to guard against the risk of sudden destabilising pressures on our global supply chains, financial messaging systems, and digital infrastructure and of structural choke points being weaponised for state coercion and our asymmetric vulnerabilities exploited to inflict targeted economic harm. Unlike China, our systems have not yet been conditioned or proofed against such vulnerabilities and building such resistance will take time.



India and China: Competition with Guardrails

Where does this leave the bilateral relationship? I believe we can neither expect a return to the pre-2020 relationship nor assume that a permanent confrontation is inevitable. There will be areas of competition. There will also be areas where cooperation may remain possible. Climate change is one. Global health is another. Multilateral institutions provide another avenue. Economic engagement will continue, though with greater scrutiny. And even where cooperation is difficult, communication remains necessary. The relationship therefore requires a layered architecture: deterrence at the frontier; resilience at home; diversification abroad; competition where necessary; cooperation where possible; and communication throughout. That may not sound as dramatic as a strategy of confrontation. But statecraft is not about drama. It is about outcomes

The Larger Question: Shaping Asia, Not Balancing China

Ultimately, I believe the China question is really an Asian question. What kind of Asia is emerging? Will Asia become dominated by a single power? Will it become an arena for US–China rivalry? Or can it evolve into a more plural and balanced order in which several major powers coexist and smaller and middle powers retain meaningful strategic space?

India has a profound interest in the last of these possibilities. And this is where India's own civilisational and strategic traditions become relevant. India has historically been uncomfortable with the idea that order must necessarily be hierarchical. Our conception of international relations has always recognised plurality. The challenge before India is to help create an Asian order in which power is balanced, sovereignty is respected, connectivity is open, and differences do not automatically produce conflict.

This suggests a change in India's strategic mindset. It is not within India's power to determine how powerful China will be. But we must be able to ensure India becomes sufficiently strong and resilient that China's rise does not determine India's choices. That objective puts the responsibility for India's strategic future primarily in our own hands. And it opens a much larger agenda. India must build the capabilities that will determine power in the twenty-first century: as a manufacturing power; a technological power; a maritime power; a knowledge power; a financial power and a space power. We need to calculate, prepare, build partnerships, strengthen our internal foundations. And above all, we need to be capable of converting our extraordinary demographic potential into human capability. This was the DXP playbook or doctrine of Tao Guang Yang Hui. You Suo Zuo Wei. We need to draw lessons from that doctrine too.

Peace: The Ultimate Objective

India and China are two ancient civilisations and two contemporary states with enormous populations, aspirations and ambitions. A major armed conflict between them would be a tragedy for Asia. It would disrupt the economic transformation of both countries. It would also damage the prospects of the Global South. And it would create opportunities for external powers to shape the Asian order in ways that neither India nor China might ultimately desire. Therefore, avoiding conflict is not weakness. It is not appeasement. It is not the abandonment of national interest. It is a strategic objective. But peace cannot rest upon hope. It must rest upon capability. That is why India needs to build its strength. To preserve its choices, to negotiate with confidence and, ultimately, to build a dignified and sustainable peace with its neighbours.

Conclusion

In recent days, our bilateral discourse has been cast in the popular metaphor of a dance between the Dragon and the Elephant. This imagery often evokes a sense of lumbering unpredictability or forced synchronization. One of our colleagues had suggested Kathakali as a truer, more dignified vocabulary for pursuing such a metaphor for India-China re-engagement. I would suggest we look at our respective heritage of classical theatre—specifically, Indian Kathakali and Chinese Opera.

Both Kathakali and Beijing Opera are independent art forms that do not ask the performers to mimic the other. A Kathakali actor stands firmly rooted in the ancient traditions of Kalaripayattu—grounded, heavy, deriving immense power from the earth. A Beijing Opera performer moves with the fluid, airborne agility of Wushu—focused on lightness, speed, and verticality. They do not merge, nor do they dilute their identities. They remain entirely themselves.

Both traditions share a language of controlled engagement. When characters spar on the stage, their conflict is codified, disciplined, and bound by strict rules of rhythm and structure. The percussion dictates the boundary; the training prevents chaos. It is a powerful reminder that competition and disagreement between nations do not have to result in disorder. Let us engage not in a forced duet, but with clarity, dancing to our own rhythm, while respecting the space and autonomy of the other.

And perhaps that is the most important lesson Chanakya offers us. The strongest state is not necessarily the one that defeats its rival. It is the state that possesses sufficient strength and wisdom to determine its own choices. Our objective should be to build an India that is capable, resilient and consequential and whose future will be determined by itself, not by China—or by any other power. That, I believe, is the foundation upon which India can contribute to a stable and peaceful Asian order.



Endnotes

- 1 Professor Srikanth Kondapalli's speech, "China's Grand Strategy: India's Long Term Response in an Asymmetric Strategic Environment," India International Centre (IIC), 25 August 2026.
- 2 Santosh Pai, "Living with China: The Economics of Dependence and Competition," in India in a Fragmenting World: Trade, Technology and Economic Security, ed. Suresh Nambath (2026).



About the Author

Vijay Nambiar

Former Head of the United Nations and Representative of the Secretary General, Vietnam, Turkiye, Malaysia

Vijay Nambiar was born in Pune (1943) and studied at St Xavier's College Mumbai. He was awarded the Chancellor's gold medal for his Masters in Bombay University in 1965. Joining India's Foreign Service in 1967, he studied Chinese and was posted to Hongkong and Beijing (1968–1972). After serving at headquarters, he was posted to Yugoslavia (1976–78) and the Indian Mission at the UN, New York (1979–82). His first Ambassadorial posting was to Algiers (1985–87). Returning to Delhi in 1987, he was Joint Secretary (East Asia) during the historic visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in December 1988. Subsequently, he served as Ambassador/High Commissioner of India in Afghanistan (1990–92), Malaysia (1993–96), China (1996–2000) and Pakistan (2000–01) as well as Permanent Representative at India's UN Mission in New York (2002–04). After retirement in 2004, he served as Deputy National Security Adviser until 2006 when he was seconded to the UN as Special Adviser to UNSG Kofi Annan. He was later Chef de Cabinet to UNSG Ban Ki Moon and his Adviser on Myanmar. He returned to India in 2017 and is now settled in Greater NOIDA.



About the Chair

The Subhas Chandra Bose (SCB) Chair of International Relations was created to study global affairs from an Indian vantage point. Rooted in the country's strategic culture, its purpose is to inform India's growing international profile and constructive role through original thinking and careful inquiry. With a keen focus on Asia as the definitive continent of this era, the Chair aims to articulate India's perspective on emerging global priorities. Established within the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy at Chanakya University, it is driven by three overarching goals: championing high-impact interdisciplinary research, equipping advanced learners and researchers with expertise across core IR domains, and fostering partnerships and a collaborative community dedicated to research and innovation.

Prof. Ashok K. Kantha has held the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professorship of International Relations since December 2025. A career diplomat for more than thirty-eight years, he served as Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs and as Ambassador and High Commissioner of India to China, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. In the decade since, he has worked closely with several research institutions and think-tanks, including a five-year term as Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies. He is a Distinguished Fellow of the Vivekananda International Foundation and of the Council for Strategic and Defence Research. His expertise in global geopolitics and Asian strategic affairs — China and the neighbourhood in particular — allows the Chair to draw on long diplomatic practice in producing analysis of practical relevance to policy.



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