

From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

China-India relations are on the mend

It looks as though misunderstandings that followed India's Pokhran II nuclear tests are getting sorted out.

China and India, two members of the "Survivors' Club" (a designation by Lyndon LaRouche of nations seeking to protect themselves from the collapse of the global financial system), during recent weeks have earnestly begun to find ways to normalize their bilateral relations. The Indian daily the *Asian Age* reported on March 10 that Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh is likely to visit China this year.

On March 15, a 15-member Chinese team led by An Chengxin, the vice president of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, came to New Delhi to hold a meeting of the India-China Joint Business Council for the first time since last year's nuclear tests conducted by India. Expectations run high among observers that the Joint Business Council will identify new areas of cooperation, especially joint bidding in third countries, participation in project tenders, equipment supply, and infrastructure projects.

Sino-Indian relations were frozen when Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes provoked Beijing by identifying China as India's main enemy, following New Delhi's testing of nuclear devices in the Rajasthan desert last May. China considered the statement to be irresponsible and a deliberate distortion to justify India's nuclear weapons development.

Following an informal meeting organized by the Schiller Institute between academics of both nations in Germany, the first signs of thaw in the two countries' relationship began to show.

The issue was given a decisive

push last December following the visit of Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov to India. During his visit, Primakov mooted the concept of a "strategic triangle" among the three most populous nations in the region: China, India, and Russia.

Subsequently, Russian Communist Party leader Gennadi Zyuganov told the foreign correspondents in Moscow on March 5 that a strategic triangle among Russia, India, and China would be the central issue in world affairs in the 21st century. Around the same time, Prime Minister Primakov, in an interview with the Chinese newspaper *Jhintsin Ribao*, talked about the "parallel development of relations between Russia-China, Russia-India, and India-China."

But the most powerful diplomatic move was initiated recently by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. His historic "bus diplomacy" with Pakistan in February, where he held meaningful talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to ease tensions between the two countries, must have convinced Beijing of New Delhi's sincere intent to promote peace, and helped convince China that India had undertaken the nuclear tests strictly to ensure its national security.

The final confirmation of the thaw was reflected in the upbeat mood of India's Foreign Office personnel upon their return from Beijing in early March. Indian media reported that their meetings with their Chinese counterparts were positive, and that the chances of Sino-India ties returning to normal were good. Soon after, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan told reporters in Beijing dur-

ing the ongoing session of the National People's Congress that he expects, "maybe soon, the Joint Working Group on the boundary question between China and India will resume its activity." He also indicated that the official talks between India and China held in Beijing were "useful discussions."

Another positive development has been the efforts undertaken by the outspoken Chinese Ambassador to India, Zhou Gang. Speaking at a recent seminar in New Delhi organized by the Indian Center for World Affairs, the Chinese envoy made clear that the recent consultations between foreign office officials was a "new starting point" to improve relations between the two countries. According to Ambassador Zhou, there is no change in China's stated objective of forging a "long-term neighborly, constructive, and cooperative partnership with India into the 21st century."

Ambassador Zhou pointed out that such a partnership will be based upon the "foundation and potential" for evolving mutually beneficial cooperation. India and China, the Ambassador said, share "similar or common views" on such issues as peace and development, human rights, environmental protection, and population control.

At the same time, a fresh impetus is likely to be given by both countries to enhance their two-way bilateral trade. Prior to the India-China Joint Business Council meeting, China Council for the Promotion of International Trade vice chairman An Chengxin told newsmen in India that the meager \$2 billion trade between such two large countries is not commensurate with the enormous natural resources and size of the population of India and China. He called for a redoubling of efforts by both sides to expand two-way trade to at least \$5 billion before this millennium comes to an end.