

Ambassador Nicholas Rossellini (UN Resident Coordinator, China), President Wang Huiyao (Center for China and Globalization), Mr. Laurence Brahm (Founder, Himalayan Consensus Summit), dear friends,

World politics today is not an orderly place, old divisions or old unities do not apply any more. There is a contest for influence between the established and the newly emerged powers, there is a matrix of rising ambition and a number of strategic fault lines. Sovereignities are contested even more fiercely than before, even if war is not a defining feature of all such situations. Politics and populism make for a toxic combination. People – the ordinary people- are drafted in as players but their voices are seldom heard in this power play. Their livelihoods, their futures, the inequalities thrust upon them, the marginalisation of the many, merit occasional mention but are not center-stage. The power play in the arena of global politics does not treat the world as if we human beings intend to stay – nationalism crowds out the concerns and interests at the sub-national level, where such issues as connectivity, blood ties, religious, spiritual, cultural and linguistic bonds that straddle borders, the protection of the cross-border environment and endangered species of flora and fauna, cross-border trade and tourism, are given less importance than the overarching concern to conserve sovereignty, and the diktat of an omnibus term - national security.

India and China are neighbours but they are imperfect neighbours. The logic of a shared border of over three thousand kilometres, and the nearness that geography has ordained for both these countries, is overshadowed by geopolitical differences. Contest and competition have defined our relations more than coexistence as defined in the Five Principles we jointly enunciated in 1954. The strategic landscape of Asia of which India and China are key constituents, is dotted with many tensions and potential areas of conflict. The dilemma we face is how we are to create a consensus that defines a rules-based order for future generations, that defuses difference, and consolidates cooperation. How do we enshrine respect for transparency, good governance, non-discriminatory trade practices, freedom of access, of navigation, non-aggression, cosmopolitanism, equality and mutual benefit?

What are the Himalayas? To me, as an Indian, and I am sure that our Nepalese friends here will also agree, they are more than mountains. They are sacred abodes. The stirring of the Indian spirit has been directed to their fastnesses, Shiva was the blue-necked, snow-crowned mountain God, Parvati, his spouse, was the spring-maiden, daughter of the Himalaya, Ganga was her elder sister; and Meru, Vishnu's mountain, was the pivot of the universe. The Himalayan shrines are still the goal of every Indian pilgrim. Thomas Holdich, the British geographer described the Himalayas thus: they are, he said, "The finest combination of boundary and barrier that exist in the world, never was such a God-given boundary set to such a vast, impressive and stupendous frontier." These were words spoken more than a century ago. Today, the Himalayas by virtue of their domination of the Asian heartland, should point us to our obligations for sustainable development, creation of livelihoods, the wake-up call of ongoing global warming and climate change, for better connectivity, synergy and communication, across natural, political and ideological barriers. We need, as Laurence Brahm just said, a broader agora of ideas to chart our way forward in this new century, this brave new world which requires new definitions of global peace and human security.

Sujeev Shakya who is here with us today has spoken of what it means to be a Himalayan citizen. In his words, the Himalayas which are part of the rimland that separates India and China and of which countries like Nepal and Bhutan are a part, are mountains that are revered by those who have lived among them and have been nurtured by them. For the Himalayan man or woman, these mountains are not borders that divide or are sources of conflict, they are life-sustaining, they are the sources of all things precious and beautiful, the glaciers that feed our rivers, the forests that provide the green cover that purifies the environment, the holy places of pilgrimage, the repositories of heritage and

culture, they are the revolving doors where numerous people have passed through over the years unhindered by border lines as perceived on modern maps. As was once said, what the map cuts up, the story cuts across. We consecrate the maps but do not remember the human history that cuts across borders. Himalayan residents like Sujeev say that politics cannot separate Himalayan nations when people yearn for free movement. In any case, there has to be more discourse and exchange as he says. Investing in the idea of the Himalaya, defining it more clearly, understanding its significance, would help reinforce our identities as India and China, and make our futures more secure. For many decades, these mountains have served to separate us more than unite us. They are where our border dispute resides, in maps we do not agree on, and transgressions that occur with dismaying regularity.

My point here is how India and China can contribute to the idea of a Himalayan Consensus despite the differences between them? Do our national interests coincide in general even if we talk of our common concerns as developing nations with large populations and the need for accelerated development built on innovation and technological advancement. Perhaps we should adopt a twenty-first century approach to our relations rather than being governed by ideas and approaches left over from the twentieth century? Can we replace the terms competition and contest with coordination? Coordination when it comes to the development of water resources, energy and irrigation projects, ecological preservation of the biodiversity of the Himalayas, the protection of endangered species, trans boundary water management, a more transparent sharing of data of river flows, the enhancement of connectivity to help people, the advancement of the welfare and well-being of our border tribes and peoples, all these merit attention. Let us try and build a new phase of closer coordination in select areas of our relationship. And let us remember that we are mountain nations and marine nations. Our coordination and cooperation must embrace both these landscapes if Asia should become truly one united uninterrupted continent.

The Belt and Road Initiative of China is a hot topic of discussion around the world today. The history of the Silk Route rekindles memories of how our two nations traded ideas, knowledge, new inventions, philosophies, religious debate, and much more. Our present seems very unpowered when compared to that light of our comradeship that created the glories of the Silk Route. In India, one of our southern states, Kerala which was the fulcrum of trade with both East and West in the ancient world, has been articulating the revival of the Spice Route which united India with 31 countries across the region before the advent of colonial rule. Indeed, the Silk Route and the Spice Route functioned as arteries linking the ancient world, as bridges of cultural and religious exchange – they provide a geo-civilizational underpinning to our millennial relationship. Then, there is the Project Mausam of the Indian Government - the word mausam is derived from the Arabic word, “Mawsim” which refers to the season when ships could sail safely propelled by monsoon winds. The Project aims at studying monsoon patterns, cultural context, maritime trade routes, and coastal landscapes, and examines key processes and phenomena that link different countries along the Indian Ocean littoral as well as those that connect the coastal centres to their hinterlands, as described by India’s Minister of Culture to Parliament in 2016. There is considerable scope for India and China to cooperate in the areas enumerated under this Project. It can encompass both the mountain and oceanic space that we share as Asians.

I am sure that the proceedings that will follow in this Conference over the next two days will enumerate many new ideas of how India and China can develop a much more substantive relationship of give and take. We need to rationalise our differences, and not let them overwhelm us. We can learn from the ASEAN countries who have learnt to do business with each other and not allowed their differences to become disputes through often conscious escalation led by chauvinistic voices in both countries. We need to be much more sensitive to each other’s concerns and develop the habits of sustained dialogue. The example of the CPEC in the Indian mind, is one where India’s

sensitivities were overlooked by China in territory that is disputed between India and Pakistan. This is a major part of the obstacle course in India-China relations today.

There is considerable substance that has been built up in our bilateral relations in the last three decades. We have a multi-faceted relationship that must be invigorated further by creative diplomacy that is innovative in its thinking and forward-looking. The world is an uncertain place, and there are no permanent friends and enemies as is said time and again. Indians and Chinese lack empathy for each other, because of the way recent history as opposed to their links in millennia past, impacts the relationship. China's border regions have been divested of all the contacts they had with India's border regions in times past – I refer to contacts between border communities, a smooth flow of trade, cultural contact, widespread pilgrimage linkages, preservation of natural resources, conservation of the environment. Creative diplomacy in the 21st century must come up with creative solutions to address such issues and requirements. A similar approach is needed when it comes to establishing a more balanced economic relationship between the two countries in the field of trade and economic interaction. Tourism and people-to-people contact is another area for concerted development. Cooperation on climate change issues, natural disaster prevention, renewable energy, digital connectivity and scientific collaboration and research between universities also requires more attention.

Each of our countries has much to learn from the other. China's post-1978 progress and advancement has made her a leading, re-emerged global power. India is on a similar path too although she has some years of catching-up to do. But what we must keep in mind is that both countries have their own strengths that can complement each other in many ways. The region in which we are will be impacted by the trends in our relationship because our collective weight is impossible to ignore – when we cooperate the region benefits, when we have tensions between us , the ground shakes and the region is rendered unstable. We have therefore enormous responsibilities not only for our own futures but far beyond our immediate borders. The importance of our relations with China is in no way diminished by relations that we develop with other world powers, including the United States. Neighbours have to invest in the relationship they have, because what they share is much more than that which divides them. History, geography, geopolitics and the economics of development together dictate this certitude. The choice should not be difficult.

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