India – China: Needs New Thinking

Why in news?

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- The Chinese Ambassador to India recently put forward some suggestions for improvement of bilateral ties between China and India.
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- The suggestions are timely since relations between the two Asian giants have looked tired and worn in recent months.
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What are some of the prevailing tensions?

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- China’s stand aginst India’s Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) bid
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- Its stand against the listing of known terrorist-progenitor Masood Azhar under the U.N. Security Council’s 1267 Committee
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- The deployment of Chinese military and engineering assets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir
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- The development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
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What are the suggestions by the ambassador?

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He suggested

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- A ‘friendship and cooperation treaty’ and a free trade agreement (FTA) to boost bilateral relations.

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- Joining of hands on China’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative.
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- Steps to resolved boundary question.
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What is their possibility?

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- Given the state of bilateral relations, and the extent of unresolved political and security issues, a treaty of friendship and cooperation may only be an inventory of good intentions but not a transformative document.
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- Trade between India and China has grown to an annual volume of $70 billion.
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- An FTA that is goods-centred will obviously **not benefit India given the huge trade in goods imbalance that favours China.**
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- An FTA that is comprehensive, covering goods and services, cross-border investment, R&D, standards and dispute resolution would be worth exploring.
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- India’s reaction to China’s OBOR has been hedging and tentative, mainly because of the **CPEC through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.**
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- The Chinese have today chosen to disregard the sovereignty issues surrounding the dispute between India and Pakistan over the State of J&K. This is a crucial reason for India’s reservations about OBOR.
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- The Chinese are seen by India to have acted in disregard of Indian sensitivities on this matter, which is a cause for legitimate concern.
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What about the revival of trade routes?

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- The question however is, whether India should explore the development of connectivity between Tibet and India, especially through the Sikkim sector into Bengal.

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- Nathu La is already the crossing point for border trade between India and the Tibet Autonomous Region.
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- **The case for its revival requires a serious examination** and should not be dismissed cursorily.
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- **An opening of ties between India and the Xinjiang region of China** is also worth examining.
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- Providing for air connectivity between Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province, and New Delhi as one of the OBOR linkages, would help the promotion of trade and commercial contact and could also help open a new chapter in counter-terrorism cooperation between India and China.
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What are the new thinkings that are needed?

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- Competitive coexistence mechanism should be formulated, with a clear delineation of areas of difference and how to manage them, the promotion of business and people-centred connectivity and mutual confidence-building.
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- The two countries have a common interest in curbing religious radicalism and terrorism. Kashmir and Xinjiang, both contiguous neighbours, have similar challenges posed by terrorism and separatist movements.
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- **Maturity of approach, and strategic patience** while each country is preoccupied with the demands of internal and external equilibrium and balancing, offers a constructive way forward.
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- The modus vivendi (an agreement allowing conflicting parties to coexist peacefully) of the last few decades are easily disturbed as recent events have shown.
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- Initiative must be taken to ensure that this trend is halted.
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- China cannot expect India not to pursue her legitimate interests in ensuring the security of its periphery, and to promote ties with other world countries.

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- At the same the realtions need not hinder a productive, comprehensive, open and frank dialogue between India and China.
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Source: The Hindu

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