

21 December 2024

Re-engagement Between India and China

Context: Recently held the 23rd meeting of the "Special Representatives" (SRs) of India and China marked a significant development in restoring bilateral relations. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi, both serving as SRs, met for the first time since 2019 to address key issues, including the long-standing boundary dispute and bilateral ties.

Background of the Meeting

The SR mechanism was established to focus on resolving the 3,500-kilometre-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) boundary dispute and other related issues. However, it had been paused since the 2020 military standoff in Ladakh. The recent meeting in Beijing represents a positive shift in relations, following discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in October.

Key Outcomes of the Meeting

1. **LAC De-escalation:** Both sides agreed to continue implementing measures to de-escalate tensions along the LAC.
2. **Resumption of Dialogue:** The SR process on the boundary issue will proceed based on the Eleven Articles agreed upon in 2005.
3. **Confidence Building Measures (CBMs):** Steps will be taken to strengthen trust through cross-border exchanges and other CBMs.
4. **Reactivation of Suspended Mechanisms:** The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) will actively monitor the implementation of agreements.
5. **Next Meeting in India:** The next round of SR talks is scheduled for 2025 in India.

Additional Developments

The two sides agreed on several confidence-building measures, such as:

- **Restarting the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra** for Indian pilgrims.
- **Resuming Border Trade** in Sikkim.
- **Sharing Data on Trans-boundary Rivers**, an issue of environmental and regional importance.

Other suspended ties, including direct flights, business visas, student exchanges, and journalist visits, are reportedly under discussion.

Significance of the Meeting

This meeting signals a gradual thaw in India-China relations after four years of strained ties. It is also a precursor to potential high-level engagements, including Prime Minister Modi's visit to China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in 2025, coinciding with 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Challenges Ahead

While the meeting brings hope, caution is necessary. The 2020 standoff highlighted vulnerabilities in India-China relations, with troop amassments and LAC transgressions by the PLA. To prevent a recurrence, the following steps are crucial:

1. **Ensuring Transparency:** The government must keep the public informed about negotiations and agreements with Beijing.
2. **Restoring Status Quo Ante:** Efforts should focus on dismantling buffer zones and returning to the pre-2020 status quo.
3. **Strengthening Deterrence:** Future mechanisms to prevent aggression at the boundary must be prioritized.

Face to Face Centres



21 December 2024

Conclusion

The 23rd SR meeting is a step forward in normalizing India-China relations. However, a balanced approach is needed to ensure that diplomatic progress does not come at the cost of national security. Restoring trust and resolving the boundary dispute will be pivotal in building a stable and cooperative relationship between the two neighbours.

Role of S.A.F.E. facility in India's manufacturing growth

Context- NITI Aayog has recently released a report, which highlights the importance of safe, affordable, convenient and efficient (S.A.F.E.) facility for industrial workers. This initiative is a big step towards strengthening India's manufacturing sector and achieving the goal of developed India 2047.

Manufacturing sector and dream of developed India

India aims to increase the contribution of manufacturing sector from 17% to 25% of GDP. This is part of initiatives like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat. To achieve this goal, an efficient and sustainable labor strategy will have to be made, in which provision of nearby, cheap and good housing for the workers will be important.

Why are S.A.F.E. facilities important?

The report states that proper and nearby housing:

1. Increased productivity: Commuting time is reduced and workers are more satisfied with better living facilities.
2. Employee retention: Permanent housing reduces the chances of workers leaving the job, which also reduces the cost of recruitment.

3. Safety for women: Safe and convenient housing for women workers increases their participation.

Key steps suggested in the report

The report has made several suggestions to solve the challenges related to facilities for workers:

1. Improvement in regulations:

- S.A.F.E. facilities should be put in a separate category so that it can get tax exemption. For example, GST exemption on accommodation up to ₹20,000 per person per month.
- These facilities should be given exemption in terms of environmental clearance like schools, colleges and hostels.
- Mixed-use development should be allowed near industrial areas so that workers can live near their workplace.

2. Financial assistance:

- Financial assistance of up to 30-40% of the project cost should be provided through Viability Gap Funding (VGF). This includes:
 - 20% funding from the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).
 - 10% from the sponsoring ministry.
 - Additional contribution from state governments.

- Affordable rental housing should also be included in the VGF scheme.

3. Public-Private Partnership (PPP):

- Dormitory-style housing should be built under the PPP model. This has been included in the Union Budget 2024-25. Under this, large industrial companies will also contribute to housing for workers.

Face to Face Centres



21 December 2024

4. Improvement of old housing:

- Old housing should be improved using VGF and their capacity and safety should be increased.

Economic and social need

The report emphasizes that the S.A.F.E. facility is not just a welfare initiative, but it is extremely important for economic development. This will solve the problems of workers and India's manufacturing sector will become globally competitive.

Everyone's responsibility

For the success of this scheme, the government, industry and private developers will have to work together. The report has appealed to all stakeholders to take concrete steps to implement these recommendations.

Conclusion

Safe, affordable and convenient housing for industrial workers is very important for the development of India's manufacturing sector. This report of NITI Aayog presents a concrete plan in this direction.

If all parties work together, India will not only build a strong industrial system, but will also fulfill the dream of Developed India 2047. This initiative shows how inclusive development can become the basis of economic strength.

National Museum Project

Context

India and France have signed an agreement to develop the Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum as part of the Central Vista Redevelopment Project. The first phase will involve retrofitting the North Block, with an expected completion date of June 2026. This follows a 2020 Letter of Intent between

India and France for cooperation in museum development and heritage conservation.

Museum Area

The Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum will span 1,55,000 square meters across the North and South Blocks in New Delhi. The museum will house a vast collection of exhibits showcasing India's rich cultural heritage. Once completed, it is expected to surpass the Louvre in Paris, becoming the world's largest museum. This ambitious project aims to establish a global cultural landmark, reflecting India's history on an unprecedented scale.

Development Approach

The museum will adopt an adaptive reuse approach for the North and South Blocks, preserving the historical significance of these buildings while transforming them into a modern museum. The development will be guided by France's expertise in museum management, ensuring that the museum adheres to international standards for exhibit curation and operations.

Phased Timeline

The retrofitting of the North Block is set to be completed by June 2026, with the ministries currently housed there expected to vacate by March 2025. Afterward, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) will begin restoring the building to its original state before commencing retrofitting.

About the Central Vista Complex

- **Location:** The Central Vista Complex stretches 3.2 km in Delhi, from Rashtrapati Bhawan to India Gate. It houses key administrative institutions, including the Prime Minister's Office.
- **History of Development:** The Central Vista Complex was envisioned after King George V's

Face to Face Centres



21 December 2024

1911 announcement to relocate India's capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Designed by British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, it included the Rashtrapati Bhavan, North and South Blocks, Parliament House, and India Gate. Post-independence, more buildings were added to accommodate the growing central government.

utilization while reflecting India's cultural heritage.

About Central Vista Redevelopment Project

- **Objective:** The Central Vista Redevelopment Project aims to enhance governance infrastructure by building new facilities for key government institutions.
- **Piloting Ministry:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- **Estimated Cost:** ₹20,000 crore
- **Launch Year:** 2019
- **Completion Year:** 2026

Proposed Developments

- **New Structures:** The project includes the construction of a new Parliament Building, residences for the Vice President and Prime Minister, a Common Central Secretariat, and a Central Conference Centre.
- **Demolitions and Conversions:** Existing structures, such as the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, National Museum, and Vigyan Bhawan, will be demolished. Some older buildings will be repurposed into museums.

About New Parliament Building Plan

- **Inauguration:** The new Parliament Building was inaugurated on May 28, 2023, as part of the redevelopment project.
- **Capacity:** The new Lok Sabha Chamber accommodates 888 members, while the Rajya Sabha Chamber holds 384. In joint sessions, the Lok Sabha Chamber can seat 1,272 MPs.
- **Design:** The building is triangular, symbolizing sacred geometry, ensuring efficient space

WHO Scientists Endorse Weight Loss Drugs for Obesity

Introduction:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has endorsed a new class of drugs, GLP-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RAs), as a treatment for obesity. This endorsement acknowledges the limitations of traditional approaches like diet and exercise in addressing the global obesity crisis. Drugs such as semaglutide and tirzepatide offer a promising alternative for effective weight management.

Why WHO Recognizes These Drugs:

Despite the effectiveness of promoting healthy eating and exercise, these strategies have not been successful in curbing the obesity epidemic. WHO reports that the global prevalence of obesity has doubled in adults and quadrupled in adolescents since 1990. In India, obesity rates have risen sharply, with millions affected. GLP-1 RAs, which mimic hormones regulating appetite and blood sugar, offer a breakthrough in managing obesity, which is linked to various health risks, including non-communicable diseases and premature death.

About GLP-1 Receptor Agonists:

GLP-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RAs) are a class of medications that mimic the action of the natural hormone Glucagon-Like Peptide-1 (GLP-1). This hormone plays a crucial role in regulating appetite, food intake, and blood sugar levels.

Uses:

Face to Face Centres



21 December 2024

GLP-1 RAs are primarily used to treat obesity by reducing appetite and promoting weight loss.

Initially developed for the management of type2 diabetes, these drugs help control blood sugar levels.

Medications such as semaglutide (marketed as Ozempic and Wegovy) and tirzepatide have demonstrated significant weight loss, with clinical trials showing up to a 25% reduction in body weight.

Significance:

The GLP-1 RA class is seen as a breakthrough in addressing the global obesity pandemic, which affects nearly 1 in 8 people worldwide.

These drugs help reduce the risk of obesity-related non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

The widespread adoption of GLP-1 RAs could have transformative effects, not only on individual health but also on global healthcare costs, which are projected to reach \$3 trillion by 2030 due to obesity-related issues.

Power Packed News

National Tansen Samman 2023

The "National Tansen Samman" for the year 2023 was given to the famous tabla player Pt. Swapan Choudhary at the world famous Tansen Festival held in Gwalior, the music capital of Madhya Pradesh.



This award is one of the most prestigious awards in the field of Indian classical music. The award consists of a sum of Rs 5 lakh, a citation and a shawl-shripahal.

This award, established in the memory of music emperor Tansen, recognizes outstanding contribution in the field of classical music.

This year, the "Raja Mansingh Tomar Samman" was awarded to Sanand Nyas, an institution of Indore.

This institution has been active in the field of classical music, drama and cultural programs for the last 35 years.

Tansen Samman plays an important role in preserving Indian cultural heritage and musical tradition. This ceremony not only inspires artists but is also an important medium to introduce the new generation to the depth and richness of Indian music.

India's economic growth forecast: FY 2026

India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) has projected the Indian economy to grow at 6.6% in FY 2025-26, up from 6.4% in the current fiscal.

The agency believes that investment will remain the main driver of growth in the coming years. GDP growth rate is improving due to economic recovery after the impact of Covid-19. However, the Indian economy is facing monetary, fiscal and external tightening. While monetary conditions are likely to improve, fiscal and external tightening may persist.

Ind-Ra has forecast growth and inflation forecasts to be impacted by dollar strength, trade tensions and reduced capital flows.

Retail inflation is expected to be 4.4% in FY 2026, lower than the 4.9% forecast for FY 2025. In addition, the trade account deficit is estimated to reach \$308 billion in FY 2026.

This underlines the need for the government to take policy reforms and address global challenges along with economic projections.

Face to Face Centres

