

# Geopolitics | Positive Steps in Sino-Indian Relations

 [etvbharat.com/en!/opinion/geopolitics-positive-steps-in-sino-indian-relations-enn25040305242](https://etvbharat.com/en!/opinion/geopolitics-positive-steps-in-sino-indian-relations-enn25040305242)

ETV Bharat

3 April 2025

**There have been signals in the recent past that there is improvement between India and China ties.**



File - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping at Arjuna's Penance, in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu on October 11, 2019 (ETV Bharat via PIB)

With the Transatlantic and West Asia entangled in attrition, devastating wars, destruction and militarisation, India and China are taking positive steps towards peace, trust and stabilisation of relations.

The significance is that this is a process that involves various levels that are driving a change in the narrative, in policy and geopolitics. The political shift stems from the highest level after Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping's meeting during the BRICS, October 2024, where they agreed on the need for peace and tranquillity on the border, and recently, both leaders in different forums again commented on the importance of this relationship.



File - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping inside a houseboat, in Wuhan's East Lake, China on April 28, 2018 (ETV Bharat via PIB)

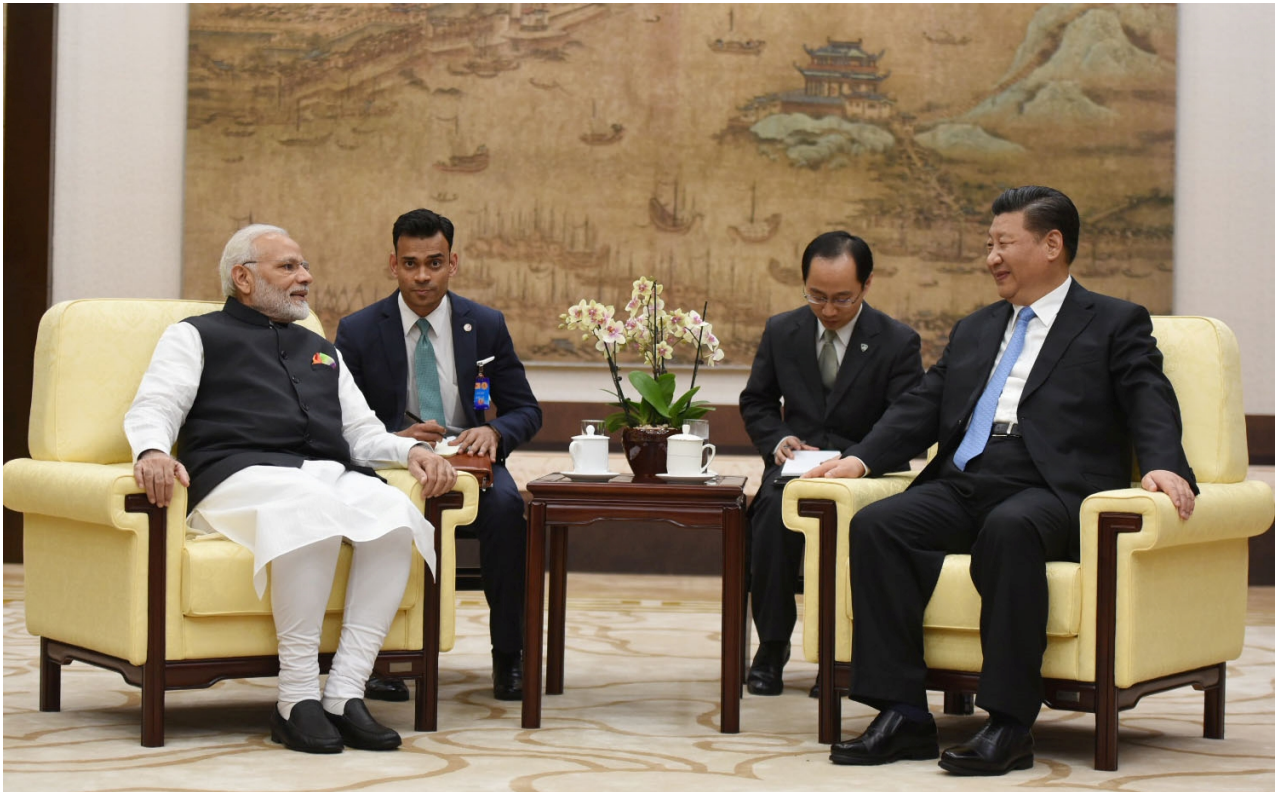
The cordiality and politics behind the recent engagement has been facilitated by the second level, by the two countries' foreign ministers' meetings at the sidelines of various forums, like the G20 at Rio de Janeiro, where they agreed on "managing differences and taking the next steps" (November 19, 2024). The understanding was for conflict management, since conflict resolution on the border is a longer and complicated process. Conflict management, on the other hand, can build confidence with de-escalation and de-militarisation of the border that would increase mutuality and trust. Any violation can mean two steps back.





File - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping visit an exhibition at Hubei Provincial Museum, in Wuhan, China on April 27, 2018 (ETV Bharat via PIB)

A parallel level of engagement for normalcy was laid by the 23rd meeting (December 18, 2024) of the Special Representatives (SRs) of India and China that is Ajit Doval, National Security Advisor and Wang Yi, Politburo member of the Communist Party of China. This meeting drew from the learnings of the border clashes of 2020 that caused much bitterness and a freeze of relations for five years. It was decided to 'inject more vitality' in the process of bilateral relations while simultaneously work on a mutually acceptable framework for settling the boundary question. This then initiated the first concrete steps like visas, exchanges between scholars, journalists, flights to resume etc.



File- Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, in Wuhan, China on April 27, 2018 (Press Information Bureau)

The fourth level at the base is the mechanism for border issues of 'Corps Commander Level Meetings' as part of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC). Set up in 2012, the 'on the ground' commanders had their 32nd meeting in December 2024, that showed that despite this cold war, dialogue between the militaries remains bilateral, open, and constant. No third party is needed and in fact resisted.

The environment around this multilevel structure of dialogue also matters. Trade volumes between the two increased from \$3 billion in 2000 to \$138.5 billion in 2024. Undoubtedly, Indian business prodded the process. A press note indicated that India may now take a nuanced approach towards FDI from China, involving high-end technologies like EVs and batteries. This would open further doors of bilateralism.

In terms of global geopolitics, India and China are beneficiaries of the globalisation decades when finance, capital, technology and manufacturing at different levels flowed to these countries. Both India and China are votaries and have played a role in the construction of a multipolar world, that has meant some amount of re-distribution of economic and geopolitical power. Both focus on developing their large mass of people, see themselves as a voice of the Global South and developing world. Both have had similar positions in various multilateral forums like on climate, Covid, development policies and trade.





File - Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanging gifts with President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu on October 12, 2019 (ETV Bharat via PIB)

The global geopolitical environment suits India, while China is under pressure from the US, who see China as too close a competitor and 'pacing threat', so there is talk of confrontation. But both India and China do not want to position themselves against any third country - especially the West, but would like to benefit from multilateral peaceful environment. Both countries are members of the G20, came together to form the BRICS, work together in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

In this context, the past troubled relations of the two should be neither forgotten or repeated. The core lies at parts of the 2,400-mile border which is disputed between the two since 1950 and erupted in a war in 1962. This was followed by a long freeze of relations till Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi went to China in 1988. Since then, relations started building but the boundary issue remained unresolved. Several protocols were in place and occasional skirmishes took place. 2017 saw a rise in nationalisms in both, amassing of troops on the border by China, and then skirmishes and bloodshed, killing of twenty Indian soldiers in 2020 that Indians felt a betrayal since several written agreements were violated. So again there was a freeze of relations between 2020-2025.

Such an atmosphere of distrust has spillover effects to the neighbourhood where all moves by the other are seen through the lens of suspicion, threat perceptions are high, narratives about the other fall into viciousness and suspicions. So India viewed China's relations with Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor with hostility. China viewed India's defence partnership with the US and QUAD as a threat.

Border-level talks and disengagement in a specific area yielded some successes, and in September 2024, S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, announced that 75 per cent of disengagement problems with China were sorted out, though both nations still had tasks ahead. This provided the basis for political engagement.

The question, however, remains. Have the two countries learnt any lessons? How will they move forward? The words emanating from the topmost leadership are exemplary when they say "differences should not become disputes". And "competition should not become conflicts". And that "issues will remain in the foreseeable future, but there are ways to address these without getting into conflicts."

These are lofty words but if they are not to be turned into empty rhetoric, much effort will have to be put, so the energy and trust that the PM and the President talked about turns into behaviour, action and policy of both these giant countries. For that channels of communications at all levels must remain open, active, and regular. Institutions for issues that matter like border and security should be steadfast with clarity and purpose. Bilateral issues from trade, tariffs to joint projects should be negotiated. But of course, all this will depend if the political engagement at multiple levels, that has taken the first step continues into a long walk along the path of peace and tranquillity.

*(Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article are those of the writer. The facts and opinions expressed here do not reflect the views of ETV Bharat)*

For All Latest Updates

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anuradha Chenoy

[...view details](#)

#### Related Articles

---