

From Around the World

Aggression on Top of the World"

by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



The India-China border measures 2,100 linear miles running through a high altitude snowy, rugged and almost impassable terrain in the Himalayas. I had just graduated from high school when India and China fought a brief border war in 1962. China claimed and encroached land inside the Indian territory in that war which included a part of now Ladakh, an Indian territory. The Chinese occupied a big chunk of Ladakh called Akasi-Chin which is situated at an elevation of 16,000 ft above the sea level. At the end of the war India and China created a line of control (LOC) along the Indo-China border and decided to solve the problem through negotiations in the future. LOC is not demarcated, and China and

India have differing ideas of where it should be located, leading to regular border transgressions.

In May of 2020, a brawl broke out between Indian and Chinese soldiers stationed at camps near LOC in Ladakh. The Indian soldiers confronted the Chinese troops and lost 20 men in the skirmish. The Chinese are ambiguous about their losses, but it could be between 40 and 100 according to some estimates. As the world has been distracted by the coronavirus pandemic, China has taken a series of aggressive actions in recent months to flex its economic, diplomatic and military muscle.

The spark for the recent tensions seems to be ignited because of a road that Indian Army is

building to get to a remote air force base through mountain passes in the Galwan Valley, which is fully within Indian territory. The Chinese don't like it as this may give India a strategic advantage over China in that region.

China is also unhappy with India's actions in August 2019 that ended Jammu and Kashmir state's traditional autonomy and created the Union Territory of Ladakh. China didn't like the change in the status quo as this action projected India as a formidable power in that region. India's superiority in the region also poses a challenge to China's Belt and Road Initiative with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passing through Pakistan occupied Kashmir bordering Ladakh.

Unfortunately, India's military options are limited beyond border skirmishes. China is on the cusp of matching the United States militarily and has a far superior war machine in comparison to India. However, India can take actions to hurt China economically. New Delhi will likely assess other nonmilitary policy options through boycotting Chinese products, businesses and ventures in India.

The Indian government recently banned 59 apps developed by Chinese companies over concerns that these apps were engaging in activities that threatened national security and defense of India. "ByteDance's TikTok, which counts India as its biggest overseas market; video call apps from Xiaomi, which is the top smartphone vendor in India; two of Alibaba Group's apps (UC Browser and UC News) and many more are the significant names targeted by India." (Source: TechChurch June 20, 2020). India is also contemplating putting restrictions on Chinese equipment in its large and growing telecom sector banning China's involvement in building India's 5G infrastructure.

There too, it's not going to be a smooth sail for India. Targeting Chinese-backed apps would mean a heavy blow to the Indian start-up companies. "Many of those companies depend on Chinese tech giants Alibaba and Tencent."

(Source: Global Times, June 30, 2020).

Companies backed by Chinese capital have made inroad in Indian businesses. Moreover, India's policies have always been unstable in this regard. As I am writing this article, TikTok just said it has been invited to meet with concerned Indian government stakeholders for an opportunity to respond and submit clarifications. Such gestures project India's indecisiveness and weakness.

There is no doubt that India is too dependent on Chinese and American technologies. India needs to be a pioneer in developing its own system and not depend on China or the US for innovation. For example, the leader in India's smartphone market is the Chinese company Xiaomi. The number two player is South Korea's Samsung. Chinese companies Vivo, Oppo and Realme are at number three, four and five respectively. There is no Indian firm with any meaningful product in India's market.

The founder of Infosys, Narayana Murthy, was quoted as saying: "There is not a single invention from India in the last 60 years that became a household name globally." He added that India had not produced "any idea that led to the earth-shaking invention to delight global citizens."

Indian universities need to do more research and produce entrepreneurs who can produce platforms like Microsoft, Google, Apple, Alibaba and Baidu. Until India does that, it will remain a second-class power in comparison to China and will have to live with their bullying.

India hopes that the current standoff would be resolved through dialogue. PM Netanyahu of Israel once rightly stated, "The weak don't survive, the strong survive. You make peace, alliances with the strong. You are able to maintain peace by being strong."