

Indo-China Diplomatic War Over Kashmir By Zafar Iqbal

Recent statement of Indian, External Affairs Minister S M Krishna about the development activities of China in Pakistan administered Kashmir has triggered growing antagonism between China and India. Indian Minister Krishna described Chinese activities in Pakistani side of Kashmir as "illegal" and said that 'India has conveyed its concern over this as well as supply of Chinese weapons to Pakistan'. Reiterating India's longstanding stance, he elucidated that "neither Pakistan nor China have a 'locus standi' in Kashmir".

China and India have a long history of border disputes, however, the tension escalated over conflicts of Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh during the last few months. China alleges that India occupies 90,000 square kilometres of its territory. It also considers Sikkim as disputed state. On the other hand, India asserts its right to 33,000 square kilometres area of Aksai Chin near Kashmir, which was given to China by Pakistan through a 1963 agreement.

Because of their global and regional ambitions both emerging Asian giants have been trying to resolve their divergences and started a relatively peaceful phase of bilateral relationship since last two decades, however, tensions between Beijing and New Delhi flared last year when China objected on visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Arunachal Pradesh, claiming it as a 'disputed area.' In the same month, India expressed its discontent over the Beijing's engagement in some major development projects in both parts of Kashmir. Yet, China stopped the construction of a road near a border village in Indian part of Kashmir, which was being built by locals under Indian government project for rural development.

Similarly, the issuance for special visas for Kashmiri citizens by China was rejected by India angrily and vigorously. Interestingly, China also issued similar visas for citizens of Arunachal Pradesh. These special visas for Kashmiri citizens have been viewed by New Delhi as an attempt by China to question status of Jammu and Kashmir as part of India, which claims over Kashmir as "as its integral part", while her rival and another participant of the dispute – Pakistan, questions India's description and advocates for plebiscite in Kashmir.

Considering the recent altercation on the border issues in Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh regions between two neighbours, observers perceive Chinese move as a deliberate 'tit for tat' action to counteract Delhi's friendly behaviour with Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama who on Tuesday, starting five day visit to religious city of Gaya in Indian Eastern Bihar state once again

infuriated China by considering India “like his home” and described himself as “son of India”.

It is worth mentioning that India’s apprehensions about the Chinese’s development advancements in Pakistani Kashmir came recently, nevertheless, since many years China is engaged there in some massive economic activities. It has been working on upraising of Mangla Dam in southern Mirpur district of Pakistani Kashmir which aims to raise the level of Mangla reservoir up to 60 feet. As part of resettlement for dam affectees, Chinese firm China International Water and Electric Corporation (CIW&EC) is also working on the construction of a bridge over Jhelum River in same area.

India has also raised its umbrage with China about \$US12.6 billion Neelum-Jhelum Hydroelectric Power Project in Pakistani Kashmir which aims the diversion of the water of Neelum (Kishan Ganga) river through a tunnel into Jhelum River. CGGC-CMEC Consortium China is working on the project.

Currently, Chinese firms are working on more than 15 mega projects in Pakistani administrated Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan in power sector which seems sound *raison d’être* for Indian worry over Chinese influence in the region.

Pakistan and China are so ‘determined’ in their joint ventures that Islamabad has neglected the routine official procedures in one of its mega projects to gratify their Chinese allies by issuing initial construction work on Kohala Power to a Chinese firm-The China International Water & Electric Corporation (CWE). Located on the border of Pakistan’s Punjab and NWFP areas and Muzaffarabad District of Pakistani Azad Jammu and Kashmir, \$2.155 billion, the project has the capacity to produce 1,050 MW of electricity.

Furthermore, 12.6-billion-dollar Diamir-Bhasha dam is also being built by China’s Three Gorges Project Corporation on the Indus River in Pakistan controlled Gilgit-Baltistan area. Chinese firms are working on six other mega power projects in Pakistani Controlled northern areas of Kashmir. These significant projects consist of: 7.8 Billion US \$ Dasu hydropower project, 70 million US \$ Phandar hydropower project, 40.01 million US\$ Bashu hydropower project, 44.608 million US\$ Harpo hydropower project and 6 billion US\$ Yulbo hydropower project.

China is also investing an enormous amount of 300 million US \$ for the rehabilitation of various areas of Pakistani Kashmir where China International Water and Electric Corporation and China BEIXIN Construction and Engineering are working in housing, communication and rehabilitation sectors.

Historically, since the partition of British India, Kashmir has been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan, who have fought four wars, in which China mostly remained on Pakistani side, nevertheless, recent Sino-India confrontation over Kashmir demonstrates that this lingering Kashmir conflict could also trigger the animosity between two emerging superpowers, which also poses alarming repercussions for the stability and peace of the region.

It is pretty interesting that amid this hostile milieu, both competitors supported each other during recent Copenhagen conference because of their economic and environmental needs and compulsions. It demonstrates that in spite of all confrontations and hostilities between Beijing and Delhi, the window of hope and good will is still exists. The people of the region hope that leadership of both neighbours would prefer to expand this opportunity to resolve long standing issues through peaceful modes which is the only way for sustainable peace and prosperity of the region.

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