



India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar signing copies of his book *Why Bharat Matters*, after speaking at a lecture organised by NUS' Institute of South Asian Studies on March 23. At the event and in his book, he talked about his thesis of how India is "non-West" but not "anti-West". ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

# Need for India, China to find ways to return stability to disputed border

India minister says challenge for the two rising powers is finding sustainable equilibrium

Connie Er  
Deputy Foreign Editor

As a long-running border dispute between India and China flares up again with heated rhetoric on both sides in recent days, India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S. Jaishankar, says that returning stability on that front is needed before the relationship between the two Asian giants can move forward.

In his first public remarks since the latest verbal sparring over Arunachal Pradesh – which China claims as Zangnan as part of South Tibet – following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration of a tunnel there earlier in March, Dr Jaishankar says India is "today trying to find a way".

"And it's not easy. I have myself invested, you know, a great deal of effort with my counterpart (in China). And at the military commanders level, at the diplomatic level, we've had 20-plus rounds of talks."

Speaking at a lecture organised by the National University of Singapore's Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) here on March 23, he makes clear that the territorial spat will not be resolved in a hurry.

But a necessary initial step is to find a way to return to the "peace and tranquillity" on the border that had existed for 45 years, after India's loss of four soldiers in 1975. The two countries have entered into various bilateral agreements between 1993 and 2013 to prevent the situation from escalating.

That peace was disrupted in 2020 when at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed in hand-to-hand combat at the 3,800km frontier, much of it poorly demarcated. Relations between India and China have soured since.

In the latest twist to the saga, the United States waded into the quarrel, saying on March 20 that it recognises the disputed Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory. China reacted the next day, saying that Washington is serving its "selfish geopolitical interests".

A media report earlier in March said India had set aside 10,000 more soldiers to guard its border with China. Asked about this at the ISAS dialogue by Straits Times associate editor Ravi Velloor, Dr Jaishankar would only quip: "I think no sensible government confirms troop movements, least of all to someone from a foreign newspaper."

India's Foreign Minister is in Singapore on a three-day visit starting



Dr Jaishankar says India and China should build on the areas that they have found agreement on.

ON CHINA

**"From 1975 to 2020, nobody got killed on that. So, for 45 years, it worked. We have to ask ourselves today, why is it not working?... The issue is really not about miscommunication. I assure you their English is wonderful, and our Chinese is even better!"**



INDIA'S EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER S. JAISHANKAR

on finding a way to return to the 'peace and tranquillity' on the border that had existed for 45 years.

ON PAKISTAN

**How do you deal with a neighbour who does not hide the fact that they use terrorism as an instrument of statecraft?**



DR JAISHANKAR

on March 23. He will meet Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, among others.

A key focus of the dialogue – attended by some 300 diplomats, academics and members of the In-

dian diaspora – was China, and Dr Jaishankar noted that until there is stability on the disputed border, "it is illogical to expect the equilibrium building, the relationship building, doing more things to move forward, because it will naturally engender enormous distrust".

With China and India emerging simultaneously as rising powers, he said: "The challenge, for me, is how do we find the sustainable equilibrium?"

Both countries should build on the areas that they have found agreement on, he added.

To him, the skirmish in 2020 was China disturbing the equilibrium by not keeping to its "part of the bargain", instead of "solidifying the foundation for an equilibrium". "From 1975 to 2020, nobody got killed on that. So, for 45 years, it worked. We have to ask ourselves today, why is it not working?"

"The issue is really not about miscommunication. I assure you their English is wonderful, and our Chinese is even better!" he added, to chuckles.

China has said that the incident happened only because India violated the bilateral consensus and made unilateral provocations in Galwan Valley, which China claims in entirety amid contestation by India. India says the Galwan Valley is in Ladakh.

Dr Jaishankar also elaborated on his thesis of how India is "non-West" but not "anti-West", which he had written about in his newly published book *Why Bharat Matters*. In this way, he said, New Delhi has expanded the room for manoeuvre on great powers relations, including with the US and Europe.

He described India's relationship with the US and Russia under its "multi-vector" policy and said it is possible to deal with each one on a "non-exclusive" basis because of India's non-alliance culture.

On another country which India shares borders with, Dr Jaishankar said Pakistan will be dealt with more firmly and will not be given "a free pass".

The two nuclear-armed neighbours have fought two wars and a limited conflict over Kashmir.

"How do you deal with a neighbour who does not hide the fact that they use terrorism as an instrument of statecraft?"

"India will not skirt this problem any more. We are not going to say, 'Well, that happened. And you know, let's continue our dialogue, because that's very important.' I think we have a problem. We must be honest enough to face up to that problem, however difficult it is," he said.

connieer@sph.com.sg



# Indian diaspora helps nation build ties with others: Foreign minister

Indians living and working overseas have helped India build relationships with other countries, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said, as he called for "a contemporary way" of viewing India's brain drain.

India can actually benefit by tapping into an expansion of the global workplace, he added.

"Drawing a line – this is inside, and that is outside, and when people go outside we lose something; I think we need to get over it," said Dr Jaishankar, when asked about the problem of brain drain in India at a lecture organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies here on March 23.

There are about 33 to 34 million Indians and people of Indian origin living abroad. He said that they contribute enormously to India, whether financially, in terms of ideas or even in boosting ties with the countries they live in.

"Many of our key relationships have changed because, actually, Indians have built relationships abroad," Dr Jaishankar said.

"If I look at Singapore, if I look at the United States, I look at the UK, I don't think our relationship would be the same if you minimise the diaspora factor," he added.

"So, I would urge you to look at it in a much more contemporary way, much more linked today to what would be the collective requirements of a global economy, and how India can today actually benefit by tapping into it.

"An expansion of the global workplace is actually to India's benefit, it is not something which is to India's detriment."

Dr Jaishankar's remarks signalled a gentler tone on the brain drain issue, while connecting members of the Indian diaspora to their ancestral country.

In December, India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told students there was no need to rush to another country for better standards of living as India can provide quality of life to its citizens.

India's government told its Parliament in 2021 it had a strategy to retain the best of the country's talent, after revealing that more than 600,000 people had given up their Indian citizenship in the last five years.

India was expected to lose 6,500 millionaires in 2023 – the second top loser of millionaires after China, which was projected to lose 13,500 millionaires in 2023, according to Henley & Partners' Private Wealth Migration Report.

Dr Jaishankar is on a three-day visit to Singapore, which started on March 23. Besides delivering a lecture on "Why Bharat Matters", he will also call on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, as well as other ministers.

He also addressed the status of Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) – a community that has come under the spotlight after the government cancelled the residency permits of more than 100 in the diaspora in the past decade over alleged anti-national speech.

The OCI status allows foreign citizens of Indian origin – numbering about 4.5 million – or foreigners married to Indian citizens to enter India without a visa, and to reside, work and hold property, among other benefits. But they have no voting rights.

An audience member at the lecture asked if OCIs can have dual citizenship. India does not allow for dual citizenships.

Dr Jaishankar said the OCI was a policy decided upon during former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's time about 20 years ago. The scheme was part of a concerted effort to reach out to overseas Indians.

"I'm not aware of any specific discussion saying, 'Okay, beyond that (reaching out to overseas Indians), what do we do?' I think people are still mulling it over and talking. That's the state of play," Dr Jaishankar said.

**Connie Er**