中印对话

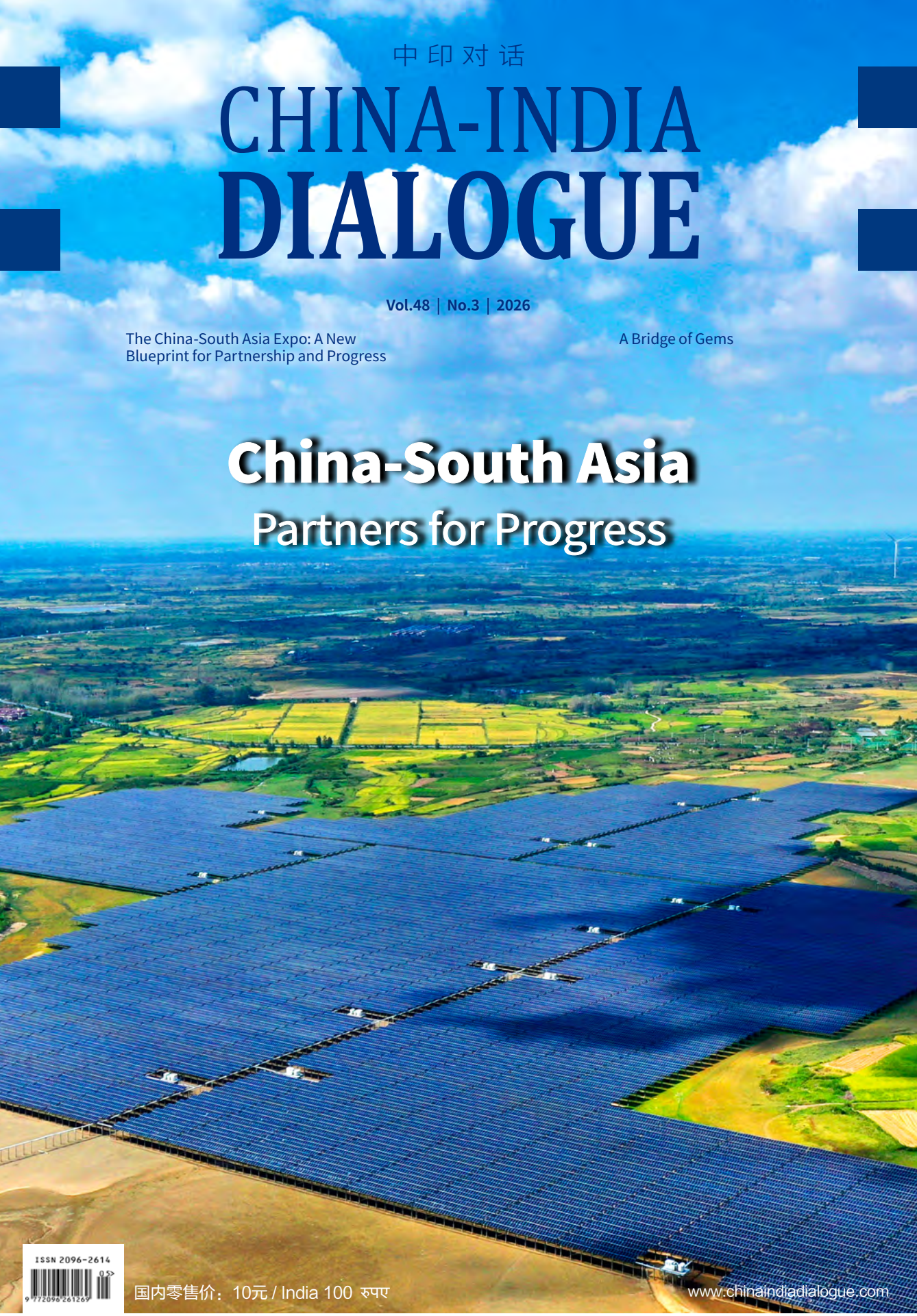
CHINA-INDIA DIALOGUE

Vol.48 | No.3 | 2026

The China-South Asia Expo: A New Blueprint for Partnership and Progress

A Bridge of Gems

China-South Asia
Partners for Progress



ISSN 2096-2614

国内零售价：10元 / India 100 रुपए

www.chinaindiadialogue.com

塞罕坝

牢记使命 艰苦创业 绿色发展

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寒来暑往，
塞罕坝机械林场的森林覆盖率
已达80%，
栽种树木按1米株距排开，
可绕地球赤道12圈。



Saihanba is a cold alpine area in northern Hebei Province bordering the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.
It was once a barren land but is now home to 75,000 hectares of forest, thanks to the efforts made by generations of forestry workers.
Every year the forest purifies 137 million cubic meters of water and absorbs 747,000 tons of carbon dioxide.
The forest produces 12 billion yuan (around US$1.8 billion) of ecological value annually, according to the Chinese Academy of Forestry.

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CHINA-INDIA DIALOGUE

Administrative Agency: 主管:
China International Communications Group 中国外文出版发行事业局（中国国际传播集团）

Publisher: 主办、出版:
China Pictorial Publications 人民画报社

Address: 地址:
33 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Haidian, Beijing 100048, China 北京市海淀区车公庄西路33号

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Publishing and Distribution Department, China Pictorial 人民画报社出版发行部
Telephone: +86-10-68412166 **电话:** +86-10-68412660
Postal Code: 100048 **邮编:** 100048

Academic Partners: 学术合作单位:
Chinese Association for South Asian Studies 中国南亚学会
Observer Research Foundation (Mumbai) 印度观察家基金会（孟买）

Legal Adviser: Yue Cheng 法律顾问: 岳成
Printing: 印刷:
Toppan Leefung Changcheng Printing (Beijing) Co., Ltd. 北京利丰雅高长城印刷有限公司

Overseas Distribution:
China International Book Trading Corporation (Guoji Shudian), 35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, P.O. Box 399, Beijing 100048, China

In China, subscriptions are available at any post office. Subscription and distribution agency in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan:
Hong Kong Peace Book Company, Ltd.
17/F., Paramount Building, 12 Ka Yip Street, Chai Wan, Hong Kong

China Standard Periodical Number:
ISSN 2096-2614
CN10-1433/D

Advertising Business License:
J.H.G.S. Advertising Business Registration No.20170199

Pricing:
¥10 / India ₹ 100

VOL.48 | NO.3 | MAY-JUNE 2026

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AI, New Energy Fuel China-India Thaw

By Ning Shengnan

Cooperation between China and India in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence (AI) and green energy is steadily unfolding, opening new avenues and providing fresh momentum for the common development of the two countries.

At a press conference on China's foreign policy and external relations on the sidelines of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress on March 8, 2026, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, took a question on China-India relations. "Mutual trust and cooperation is beneficial to the development of the two countries, while division and confrontation is detrimental to the rejuvenation of Asia," he stated. "The two sides should follow the direction set by our leaders, remove interference, and advance toward the same goals."

China-India relations continued to improve in 2025. In August of that year, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met in Tianjin following their Kazan meeting in 2024, further improving bilateral ties. Steady improvement in diplomatic relations has fueled economic and trade cooperation between the two countries, demonstrating strong resilience and vitality. According to China's

General Administration of Customs, bilateral trade in goods between China and India reached US$155.62 billion in 2025, up 12.4 percent year-on-year, an increase of US$17.14 billion over 2024. In addition to traditional goods trade, cooperation between China and India in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence (AI) and green energy is steadily unfolding, opening new avenues and providing fresh momentum for the common development of the two countries.

VAST POTENTIAL IN AI COOPERATION

At an invitation from the government of India, a Chinese delegation led by Vice Minister of Science and Technology Chen Jiachang attended the India AI Impact Summit 2026 on February 19. According to Indian media reports, it was the first time India invited China as a partner country to its high-level annual AI summit, ranking China alongside the United States as a leading country in the AI field.

China and India have many complementary traits in the AI field. China boasts advanced AI infrastructure, robust computing power development, and strong hardware manufacturing capabilities. In the domain of general-purpose large models, innovative achievements represented by DeepSeek, Qwen, and others demonstrate strong momentum in technological progress and exceptional research and development (R&D) efficiency. China's comprehensive industrial system, covering all categories, provides ideal application scenarios for AI. India, on the other hand, offers multilingual data and a vast, cost-effective pool of technical talent alongside expertise in software development and information technology services. Together, the two countries can achieve synergy across the AI industrial chain, unlocking considerable potential for cooperation.

Leveraging their respective national strengths, China and India can establish joint R&D centers to develop low-cost, high-performance solutions tailored to shared priorities such as agricultural forecasting, inclusive healthcare, and multilingual education. Furthermore, as major developing countries and important members of the Global South, China and India need to deepen cooperation in global AI governance to help bridge the "AI divide" for Global South nations and secure their voice and participation in rule-making in the international AI landscape.

DEEPER COOPERATION IN NEW ENERGY

In recent years, India has been accelerating its transition toward a diversified energy mix. Facing long-standing power shortages and insufficient energy supply, India sees developing renewable energy as a key pathway to enhancing sustainable supply capacity. At the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2021, Prime Minister Modi pledged to achieve 50 percent of its energy needs from renewables by 2030 and net-zero carbon emissions by 2070.

Meanwhile, after more than a decade of development and market competition, Chinese new energy enterprises have generally developed comprehensive advantages in cost, technology, and delivery capacity. With a mature industrial chain, a well-established system, and efficient operations, Chinese companies have gained strong competitiveness in the international market and are well positioned to provide effective support for India in achieving its renewable energy goals.

Many Chinese companies have already entered the Indian market: JinKo Solar, LONGi Green Energy Technology Co., Ltd., and Trina Solar are major suppliers of photovoltaic modules in India. In the



Industrial humanoid robots carry out collaborative training across multiple units, scenarios, and tasks at a 5G smart factory in Ningbo City, Zhejiang Province. (Photo from China News Service)

wind power sector, Envision Energy has become one of the largest wind turbine manufacturers in the country. In energy storage, Chinese enterprises such as Star Charge, Trina Storage, Narada Power, and SVOLT have secured contracts in India.

In addition, Chinese companies have also been actively building production capacity in India, injecting strong momentum into the localization process of India's new energy industry. In 2018, the factory operated by Sungrow, a leading Chinese producer of solar inverters, commenced production in Bengaluru with an annual production capacity of three gigawatts. Envision Energy built a nacelle manufacturing plant with an annual output of three gigawatts in Pune, the second-largest city in Maharashtra, and a blade manufacturing plant with an annual capacity of 2.5 gigawatts in Tamil Nadu, seeking to make India its international engineering service center. Sany Heavy Energy opened an overseas industrial park in India to focus on deepening its presence in the local market. As cooperation between China and India in the new energy sector continues to deepen, Chinese enterprises will likely become even more involved in the development of India's relevant industrial chains.

During this year's annual gathering of China's national legislators and political advisors, "fostering new growth drivers" and "creating new forms of smart economy" were proposed. For the first time, "future energy" was included in the government work report. This signals a new direction for deepening industrial cooperation between China and India. Currently, India is at a critical juncture of energy transition and digital development while China has accumulated extensive experience and complete industrial chain advantages in areas such as new energy equipment, smart grids, energy storage technologies, and AI applications. Both countries can leverage multilateral platforms such as BRICS to strengthen policy coordination and project alignment and promote the upgrading of cooperation models from trade to multidimensional advancements in technological R&D, joint standard-setting, and production capacity collaboration.

Looking ahead, as bilateral relations continue to improve, China and India are more than capable of transforming their complementary industrial strengths into strong momentum for shared development. The two countries can enrich their bilateral relationship with more measurable outcomes and steadily steer China-India cooperation toward a more pragmatic and mature trajectory.

The author is deputy director and associate research fellow of the Department for World Economy and Development Studies, China Institute of International Studies.

India-China Energy Cooperation: **Towards a Trilateral Partnership with the Gulf**

By Suvro Parui

India-China-GCC energy collaboration can help anchor peace, prosperity, and ecological sustainability across Asia over the coming decades, transforming shared vulnerabilities into shared opportunities.

India and China, both emerging economies with massive energy demand, are reshaping global market trajectories, shipping lanes, and climate governance as they tap into Gulf oil and gas. Yet this dependence exposes them to shared vulnerabilities — geopolitical flashpoints, maritime disruptions, and price volatility. Over the coming decades, the two Asian giants have an unprecedented opportunity to forge a structured partnership that bridges their energy gap through a coordinated, low-carbon, and security-centric strategy that stabilizes Asia and accelerates the global energy transition.

SEEKING ENERGY SECURITY

India and China together account for more than a third of global energy demand growth. Both nations rely heavily on Gulf suppliers, including Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC), which provide more than half of India's crude imports and a significant portion of China's as well. This dependence creates a common vulnerability: Any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz or wider Persian Gulf shipping lanes could trigger price surges and inflationary shocks across Asian economies.

Geopolitically, the Gulf has become a contested arena where the interests of the United States, Russia, regional powers, and now India intersect. New Delhi's Link and Act West policy positions the Gulf as a core theater of economic, energy, and political outreach. For Beijing, the Belt and Road Initiative has embedded Gulf oil and gas into a larger network of connectivity.

Their shared need for stable supplies, secure routes, and diversified energy sources creates room for a collaborative paradigm. India and China could launch joint maritime security cooperation such as coordinated escort missions or information-sharing arrangements in the Gulf and Indian Ocean, or pool their expertise in maritime security and pipeline protection. A broader trilateral framework involving GCC countries could institutionalize such coordination, reduce the risk of miscalculation, and reinforce the principle that energy security is a collective endeavor, not a zero-sum game.



Haiji-2, a record-breaking deepwater jacket structure, serves as the cornerstone of the secondary development project of the Liuhua Oilfield in Guangdong Province, China's first deepwater oilfield.
(Photo by Wan Quan/*China Pictorial*)

DIVERSIFYING THE ENERGY MIX

Over the coming century, energy security will be defined not merely by the volume of oil barrels or liquefied natural gas (LNG) tonnes, but by the resilience of low-carbon energy systems. Gulf economies such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are already pivoting from oil dependence toward diversified energy portfolios that include solar, wind, hydrogen, and carbon capture technologies, with net-zero targets set between 2050 and 2060. Aligned with China's 2060 and India's 2070 net-zero goals, this shift calls for jointly built infrastructure to support clean-energy supply chains, storage facilities, and grid integration.

For India and China, that means treating renewables, hydrogen, and carbon management as core elements of national security. Joint investments in Gulf-based solar parks, offshore wind farms, and green-hydrogen hubs can anchor long-term contracts for clean molecules, beyond just fossil fuels. By investing early in carbon capture and storage, battery-grade minerals processing, and circular-economy models, the two countries can serve as a hedge against future fossil-supply shortages and price swings in a decarbonizing world.

Structurally, India and China bring complementary strengths to such a partnership. India is actively developing its potential as a processing hub for critical minerals and is already pursuing joint ventures with Saudi Arabia and the UAE through entities such as KABIL and ONGC. India can offer expertise in engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC), grid-integration studies, and digital-efficiency solutions. China, in turn, is a global leader in the manufacturing of solar panels,

wind turbines, and lithium-ion batteries, while also pioneering AI-optimized grid management and high-efficiency refining process. Chinese enterprises including LONGi and JinkoSolar have supplied major projects in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Hydrogen is emerging as the most promising frontier for a tripartite energy architecture. Deals between Gulf countries and China are advancing hydrogen infrastructure, while Gulf-India partnerships are aligned with India's National Green Hydrogen Mission, which targets export-oriented, low-emission hydrogen production from 2030 onward. A formal trilateral hydrogen corridor could link Gulf solar and wind power with Chinese electrolyzers and logistics as well as Indian industrial consumers. Such a "green-molecules" triangle would not only diversify supply but also shield Asian industries from future carbon border adjustment mechanisms and price volatility.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

On the institutional front, India and China signed a memorandum of understanding on oil and gas cooperation in 2006, yet this framework is in urgent need of revision to address the era of green transformation. A trilateral India-China-GCC forum could serve to align investment regulations, technical standards, and research agendas across the three parties.

Regular high-level summits, technical working groups, and joint R&D hubs could institutionalize coordination across a broad spectrum — from pipeline security to AI-driven refinery optimization and carbon-capture deployment. A dedicated trilateral clean-energy taskforce could further accelerate dispute-resolution mechanisms, licensing procedures, and financing instruments, thereby lowering both the time and cost associated with deploying joint projects throughout the region.

Looking ahead, the Gulf energy landscape may look very different from today's fossil-dominated system. Offshore gas fields, AI-optimized refineries, and carbon-neutral industrial clusters could become the core components of a hybrid energy ecosystem underpinned by renewable-hydrogen exports. India and China could jointly secure long-term gas contracts and co-finance offshore developments, while layering in renewable-based hydrogen and ammonia to buffer against future fossil-fuel supply disruptions. When combined with joint R&D on next-generation technologies such as fusion, advanced storage, and carbon-negative materials, this partnership has the potential to reduce regional emissions and contribute to stabilizing Asia's energy-intensive economic growth.

Admittedly, the path to such cooperation is not without obstacles. Bilateral tensions, market volatility, intellectual-property disputes, and differing regulatory frameworks will test any trilateral arrangement. Yet the shared benefits derived from supply-chain resilience, regional stability, and climate-adaptive growth offer strong incentives for creative solutions and mutual accommodation.

The trilateral collaboration among India, China, and the GCC in renewable energy, critical minerals, and hydrogen could serve as a model for Global South cooperation on energy security. This partnership can help anchor peace, prosperity, and ecological sustainability across Asia over the coming decades, transforming shared vulnerabilities into shared opportunities.

The author is an associate professor of Chinese Language at Amity University, Haryana.

Indian Delegation's Clean Energy Mission to China: **An Urgent Necessity**

By Zhou Xin

Indian companies are seeking cooperation with Chinese counterparts in electric vehicle charging, battery solutions, and renewable energy.

According to media reports, a delegation from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi (PHDCCI) visited China from March 29 to April 4 to study the development of the new energy industry, touring dozens of enterprises across Shanghai, Jiangsu Province, and Zhejiang Province.

Yu Jing, a spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in India, said on X that this was the first Indian business delegation to visit China in more than five years.

The Times of India reported that this visit marked another significant step toward the normalization of India-China relations.

DEEPENING NEW ENERGY TRADE TIES

The delegation consisted of representatives from eight Indian companies involved in electric vehicles (EV), electric trucks, battery energy storage, and energy trading, six of which are startups. The delegation held talks with more than twenty Chinese companies including Narada Power, Chilwee Group, and Trina Solar, spanning the entire supply chain of renewable energy and electric vehicles.

"China has emerged as a global leader in renewable energy deployment, battery technology, and electric vehicle manufacturing, while India is rapidly expanding its clean energy capacity and strengthening its electric mobility ecosystem," said Ranjeet Mehta, chief executive officer (CEO) of PHDCCI. "Both countries will play a significant role in shaping the future of sustainable energy and transportation."

Aditya Narain Misra, co-founder and CEO of RePrime Energy, noted after the

visit that combining China's manufacturing depth with India's growing demand for energy infrastructure holds strong potential.

The Times of India noted that "the visit aims to strengthen engagement between Indian businesses and their counterparts in eastern China, particularly in Shanghai and the provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu, while encouraging new trade and investment partnerships."

India's BW *Businessworld* magazine reported that for Indian startups battling high component costs, prolonged sourcing cycles, and technology gaps in EV charging and storage, the visit provided a first-hand look at China's clean-tech success. It highlighted how scale manufacturing, supply chain integration, and local government support drove this ecosystem and how Indian firms might adapt elements of this model through partnerships and sourcing deals.

According to data from the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations of India, China-linked brands such as BYD, MG, and Volvo/Geely accounted for about 30 percent of India's passenger EV market in 2025.

Economic and trade exchanges between the two countries in new energy sectors including electric vehicles are gaining momentum.

Economic and trade exchange between the two countries in new energy sectors including electric vehicles are becoming increasingly robust.

GLOBAL INSTABILITY MAKES INDIA'S ENERGY TRANSITION IMPERATIVE

Commenting on the Indian delegation's visit, CNBC suggested that energy shocks from the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict have exposed India's vulnerability regarding fossil fuels, prompting Indian firms to turn to China for cooperation in EV charging, battery solutions, and renewable energy.

With its heavy reliance on energy imports, India burns considerable fossil fuels in its energy consumption mix. According to the International Energy Agency, fossil fuels satisfy about 70 to 80 percent of India's energy demand.

According to Reuters, as the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, India relies on imports to meet over 90 percent of its oil needs and half of its natural gas demand. Before the flare-up of the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict, more than 40 percent of India's crude oil imports came from the Middle East.

Following the outbreak of the conflict, crude oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz were severely restricted, causing oil prices to surge. Consequently, the Indian rupee slumped to a historic low against the U.S. dollar.

"The conflict has accelerated the global transition from petrostates to electrostates," wrote Ashok Kantha, former Indian ambassador to China, in a recent article. "The U.S., doubling down on fossil-fuel geopolitics, is finding its structural leverage increasingly outdated in comparison."

Arguing that China was well prepared for an energy shock during this conflict, Kantha remarked that China has not only built the world's largest strategic petroleum reserve but has also achieved the fastest electrification program globally, leading the supply chains for solar energy, wind power, EVs, batteries, and green technologies. He suggested India learn from China's approach to anticipate and prepare for future energy crises.

The China-South Asia Expo: A New Blueprint for Partnership and Progress

By Chen Lijun



From June 11 to 16, the 10th China-South Asia Expo (CSAE) was held in Kunming, capital of China's southwestern Yunnan Province. The expo has become an important platform for advancing cooperation between China and South Asian countries and has witnessed the steady growth of their commercial ties. Over the years, China and South Asian countries have leveraged their complementary strengths to expand trade and economic cooperation, promoting mutual benefits and shared prosperity.

A GROWING PLATFORM FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

Since the late 1970s, China has been committed to opening up, leading to a steady growth of cooperation platforms with South Asian countries and yielding fruitful results. In 1993, the China Kunming Export Commodities Fair was held with a focus on markets in South and Southeast Asia, opening a new channel for regional economic and trade connectivity.

In 1999, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum for Regional Cooperation was founded, establishing a vital bridge for academic exchange and

think tank collaboration. In 2007, the South Asian Countries Commodity Fair debuted in Beijing and was subsequently hosted by Kunming. In 2012, the BCIM Business Council officially began operations, further consolidating the foundation for economic and trade cooperation between China and South Asian countries. In 2013, the South Asian Countries Commodity Fair was upgraded to the CSAE, co-hosted by China's Ministry of Commerce and the Yunnan provincial government, transforming it into a flagship gateway for China's engagement with the region.

In November 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the 6th CSAE, noting that as friendly neighbors and partners in development, China and South Asian countries are a community with a shared future. He stressed that China is eager to work with all countries, especially through the China-South Asia Exposition platform, to foster consensus on enhancing solidarity and cooperation and pursuing development, create more growth drivers, advance the high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and implement the Global Development Initiative to build a more prosperous and brighter future together.

In recent years, China has co-organized trade and investment conferences with South Asian countries including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. In addition, it has set up a South Asia pavilion at the CSAE and coordinated with other major expos — including the China International Import Expo (CIIE), the China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE), and the China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair) — as well as major domestic e-commerce platforms, to provide support such as free booths for South Asian exhibitors, helping them expand into the Chinese market.

The CSAE has gained a growing international appeal over the years. The previous nine editions attracted participants from 91 countries, regions, and international organizations, with five million visits in total. This year, it drew representatives from 68 countries, regions, and international organizations, plus 112 enterprises from the Fortune Global 500, China Top 500, or leading industry players.

HIGH-LEVEL LEADERSHIP SOLIDIFIES FOUNDATION FOR COOPERATION

In recent years, China-South Asia economic and trade cooperation has progressed steadily, driven by high-level exchanges and the Belt and Road cooperation. Chinese President Xi Jinping has proposed four major global initiatives: the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, and the Global Governance Initiative. Through bilateral and multilateral meetings, Chinese leaders have maintained close communication with their South Asian counterparts. Leaders from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other countries have visited China regularly, providing strategic guidance for deeper cooperation and regional stability.

This year has been particularly significant. In 2026, China and Pakistan celebrated the 75th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations. From April to May, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited China successively. The two sides reached broad consensus, signed multiple cooperation agreements, and mapped out a comprehensive plan for future cooperation. In Nepal, newly appointed Prime Minister Balendra Shah was sworn in on March 27. While the new government remains focused on domestic issues, it continues to attach great importance to the traditional friendship and practical cooperation with China. Nepalese Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal paid an official visit to China

from June 14 to 17, during which both sides agreed to advance the high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. In Bangladesh, Tarique Rahman led the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to victory in the general election in February and assumed office as prime minister. His official visit to China from June 24 to 26 opened a new chapter in bilateral cooperation.

Over the years, China and South Asian countries have steadily improved their cooperation mechanisms. Seven bilateral economic and trade commission mechanisms are now in place, along with five agreements on investment protection and avoidance of double taxation, and free trade deals with Pakistan, the Maldives, and others. Supported by improved policy frameworks and greater openness, industrial and supply chain integration between China and South Asian countries continues to deepen, making the pie of shared benefits ever bigger.

CONNECTIVITY FOR WIN-WIN OUTCOMES

Since the 1990s, connectivity between China and South Asian countries has steadily improved, with a transportation network across sea, land, and air links taking shape. In aviation, major Chinese cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu have opened direct international routes to many South Asian destinations. Kunming, a frontier gateway to South Asia, had already launched multiple routes before the COVID-19 pandemic, linking the city with Kolkata and New Delhi in India, Kathmandu in Nepal, Dhaka in Bangladesh, Colombo in Sri Lanka, and Malé in the Maldives.

After the pandemic, China has continued to strengthen cross-border connectivity with South Asian countries by restoring suspended air routes and accelerating key connectivity projects, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the South and Southeast Asia Information Corridor, the BCIM Economic Corridor, and the China-Myanmar-Indian Ocean New Corridor. Direct flights between the Chinese mainland and India are steadily resuming, connecting major Chinese cities with key commercial hubs in India and greatly facilitating business and people-to-people exchange.

In 2025, trade between China and South Asian countries surpassed US$200 billion, up by 10.7 percent year-on-year. Chinese agricultural specialties, machinery, chemicals, and electronics continue to see strong demand in South Asian markets, while South Asian mineral products, handicrafts, and tropical fruits are gaining ground in China.

Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and South Asian countries are sharing development opportunities and deepening industrial capacity cooperation. Several landmark projects have become symbols of regional cooperation, including the CPEC and Gwadar Port, Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City project, Bangladesh's Padma Bridge, the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, and Nepal's Pokhara International Airport. These projects have upgraded transportation and energy infrastructure, enhanced the local investment environment, bolstered manufacturing capacity and industrialization, expanded market supply, and delivered tangible benefits to local communities in their work and daily life.

China-South Asia cooperation, particularly the CSAE, has yielded some of the most encouraging results in high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. Looking ahead, China will stay committed to openness, inclusiveness, and mutual benefits, expand the shared gains of cooperation, and work with South Asian countries to open a new chapter of regional prosperity and development.

The author is a research fellow and the vice dean of Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences.

Staying the Course: **Why Indian Entrepreneurs Keep Betting on China**

By Gaurav Maurya



When Indian businessman Nirosh first arrived in Yiwu, a small city in eastern China's Zhejiang Province, in 2003, it had not yet earned its nickname as the "world's supermarket." Two decades on, he never expected his team to grow from three to fifty people, nor that procurement from the Yiwu International Trade Market would account for half of his company's business. In the same year, another young Indian trader, Hari, came to China and began his career at a company's Shenzhen office. Later, he settled in Shishi, a small coastal city in southeastern China's Fujian Province, where he has been engaged in foreign trade for more than 20 years.

The common thread running through these stories is simple: Doing

business in China is far easier than most people imagine, provided you are willing to stay.

FROM CLOSED TO OPEN: OVER FOUR DECADES OF TRANSFORMATION

In December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) called for the introduction of advanced foreign technology and equipment, as well as economic cooperation with other countries. The following year, China enacted its first joint venture law, opening the door to foreign capital. In 1980, four special economic zones, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen, were established, becoming the frontline for attracting foreign investment and technology.

That marked the "1.0 era" of China's opening up: a cautious exploration carried out with the prudence of "crossing the river by feeling the stones." Foreign capital was confined to joint ventures, with equity caps and a lengthy list of industry restrictions. Even so, foreign investment flooded in, and China's foreign trade volume soared from US$20.6 billion in 1978 to US$1.15 trillion in 2004.

The pace of opening up accelerated significantly after China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. The negative list for foreign investment access was gradually shortened from 31 restrictive measures in the 2021 edition to 29 in the 2024 edition, and in 2024, China eliminated all remaining restrictions on foreign investment in manufacturing, meaning foreign investors can hold 100 percent equity in manufacturing enterprises.

The momentum continued. In 2025, China unveiled a 20-measure action plan to stabilize foreign investment. In July of that year, seven government departments jointly introduced new measures to encourage reinvestment by foreign-funded enterprises. Then in December, the 2025 edition of the *Catalogue of Encouraged Industries for Foreign Investment* was released, which expanded the list to 1,679 items — up by 205 items from the 2022 version, with 303 entries revised.

Policy "subtractions" reduce barriers to entry, whereas "additions" provide encouragement and direction. Taken together, the two are bringing China's business environment into clearer focus.

WHAT KEEPS INDIAN ENTREPRENEURS IN CHINA

For Indian businesspeople, the appeal of China is both tangible and easy to measure.

Efficiency. In December 2025, Indian entrepreneur Prakash Dadlani shared a post about his China trip on social media that quickly went viral. His schedule was packed: an 8:20 a.m. train from Hong Kong into the Chinese mainland; a meeting at the first factory by 11 a.m.; a visit to the second factory after lunch at 1:30 p.m.; the third at 3 p.m.; the fourth at 4:30 p.m.; and finally, a 6:30 p.m. train back to Hong Kong. "Three cities, four factories, one day," he wrote, crediting "insane infrastructure, tight ecosystems, rail connectivity, and factories that were super prepared." As he put it, "you can't measure this kind of productivity… until you experience it yourself."

Market. Bilateral trade between China and India hit a record US$155.6 billion in 2025, with Indian exports to China rising 9.7 percent that year. China remained India's largest trading partner. From small commodities in Yiwu to electronics in Shenzhen, from Indian restaurants in Xi'an to textiles in Keqiao, Indian entrepreneurs have taken root in large and small cities across China.

A maturing legal environment. Nirosh once ran into trouble protecting his intellectual property, a case that was ultimately resolved after the Yiwu

Municipal People's Procuratorate stepped in. In June 2024, the procuratorate held a legal education session in Jimingshan Community for more than 60 businesspeople from the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and elsewhere, with the session delivered entirely in English. Yiwu has since rolled out multilingual legal handbooks, set up foreign-related legal service stations, and runs regular "prosecutors in the community" outreach. "The procuratorate doesn't just solve problems," Nirosh said. "It teaches us how to prevent them."

A place in daily life. Rajesh, who runs two Indian restaurants in Ningbo, has lived in the city for 14 years and calls it "business-friendly and pleasant to live in." In Keqiao, Indian businessman Neeraj operates a textile trading company and chairs the local Indian Chamber of Commerce, a hub for more than 1,000 Indians living in the area.

None of this means doing business in China is without friction. Language and cultural differences remain the most common obstacles. Nirosh admits he took losses early on simply because he knew too little about Chinese law. Periodic strains in China-India relations also introduce uncertainty into trade and economic exchanges. Yet even amid geopolitical tensions, major Indian conglomerates — from the Adani Group to Reliance Industries — have continued to quietly deepen cooperation with Chinese companies in fields such as electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries.

A MORE OPEN, MORE PREDICTABLE FUTURE

Looking ahead, the optimization of China's business environment shows no sign of slowing. The 2025 edition of the market access negative list reduced the number of items from 117 to 106. Services are emerging as a new focus of opening up, with pilot programs expanding in sectors including telecommunications, healthcare, and education. A total of 70,392 new foreign-invested firms were established across China in 2025, marking an increase of 19.1 percent year on year, according to China's Ministry of Commerce.

"Yiwu is the starting point of the China-Europe Railway Express and a shining example of Belt and Road cooperation," said Nirosh. "Foreign entrepreneurs bring not just orders but also trust in this city. In return, Yiwu offers not just profits, but respect and protection as well."

From the first joint venture law in 1979 to the full opening up of manufacturing in 2024, and from the establishment of four special economic zones to the tens of thousands of foreign businesspeople who now call Yiwu home, China has consistently opened its doors wider to the world for more than four decades. For Indian entrepreneurs like Nirosh, Rajesh, and Hari, that evolution is not an abstraction in macroeconomic policy — it is their daily reality.

As Prakash Dadlani — the entrepreneur who toured four factories in one day — put it, "Some things you can't measure until you experience them yourself." A growing number of Indian businesspeople are voting with their feet, choosing to stay and experience firsthand the commercial pulse of the world's second-largest economy.

The author is a senior editor at Aptara Publications, New Delhi.

A Bridge of Gems

By Shahin M Aboosalih

Returning to the China-South Asia Expo each year feels like a reunion. Many customers return to our booth — not just to admire our gemstones, but to catch up, share stories, and strengthen friendships built over the years.

Each year, when I arrive in Kunming for the China-South Asia Expo, it feels less like a trade show and more like a homecoming. As I carefully arrange rows of brilliant blue sapphires, glowing rubies, polished cabochons, and handcrafted jewelry in my booth, I know that each gemstone holds far more than beauty — it holds a story, a family legacy, and decades of trust forged across borders.

This year, from June 11 to 16, I once again had the privilege of exhibiting at the 10th China-South Asia Expo held in Kunming, Yunnan Province. Having attended before, I've seen firsthand how it has grown into one of the region's most influential platforms for trade, investment, and cultural exchange. Each year, thousands of visitors walk the halls, exploring new developments in manufacturing, green energy, digital technology, logistics, agriculture, and consumer goods. But for me, the Sri Lankan pavilion remains the most meaningful stop, where generations of craftsmanship meet the promise of new partnerships.



An exhibitor (right) displayed intricate gemstone jewelry at the 10th China-South Asia Expo. (Photo courtesy of Maitri Sharma)

MORE THAN A MARKETPLACE

During my early visits to China, I was simply looking for new business opportunities. The Chinese market's enormous potential — and its growing appetite for fine gemstones — was unmistakable. What I didn't expect, however, was that the business would gradually evolve into something much deeper.

Today, the China-South Asia Expo ranks among the most important events on my professional calendar. Supported by Sri Lanka's National Gem and Jewellery Authority (NGJA), the exhibition enables us to present our world-renowned Ceylon sapphires, rubies, semi-precious stones, and handcrafted jewelry to buyers from across China and beyond.

The expo is far more than a showcase for gemstones. It is a gathering place where wholesalers, retailers, manufacturers, investors, and traders come together to discuss new partnerships, explore emerging markets, and exchange ideas. Every conversation carries the potential to blossom into a lasting business relationship.

Glancing around the exhibition hall, I realized just how much has changed since many of us first stepped into the Chinese market. I still remember the years after the 2008 global financial crisis, when businesses worldwide were searching for new opportunities. At the same time, China was opening up rapidly, and demand for gemstones was climbing steadily. Many Sri Lankan traders, myself included, began visiting China more often, hoping to forge lasting relationships.

Back then, language was often our

biggest challenge. We relied heavily on English-Chinese interpreters to communicate with customers and close deals. But over time, many of those interpreters became trusted colleagues, close friends, and even business partners. Some have since built successful careers in the gemstone industry themselves. Looking back, it is remarkable how connections that began with simple translations evolved into partnerships rooted in trust and mutual respect.

Returning to the China-South Asia Expo each year feels like a reunion. Many customers return to our booth — not just to admire our gemstones, but to catch up, share stories, and strengthen friendships built over the years.

A FAMILY LEGACY PASSED DOWN THROUGH GENERATIONS

My own journey is but one chapter in a far larger story. Many of us in Sri Lanka's gemstone industry were born into family businesses. We grew up surrounded by precious stones, listening to conversations about color, clarity, origin, and craftsmanship long before we could fully understand their meaning. Yet our families often encouraged us to gain experience outside the trade first — working in corporate environments, studying international business, or living abroad — before returning to carry on the family legacy.

That blend of modern business acumen and traditional artisanal skill has become one of our industry's greatest strengths.

Learning the gem trade is no overnight process. It starts with patient observation. As young apprentices, we spend years learning to identify gemstones, understand what customers are looking for, and communicate with skilled cutters who transform rough stones into finished masterpieces. Many of us also work overseas before returning home, bringing back fresh perspectives and global insight.

As I took in this year's exhibition, I saw that heritage alive in every display. Beautifully set sapphires and polished cabochons are not mere products for sale — they represent generations of accumulated wisdom and craftsmanship.

Sri Lanka's contribution to the gemstone industry extends well beyond the treasures found on our own island. For centuries, Sri Lanka has served as one of the world's leading gemstone trading centers. Through our international networks, we can introduce buyers to some of the world's most extraordinary gemstones, including the famous Padparadscha sapphires, rare Kashmir blue sapphires from India, and the highly prized Paraíba tourmalines from Brazil.

For many Chinese buyers, exhibitions like the China-South Asia Expo offer their first direct gateway to these global networks. But the journey rarely ends there.

Over the years, I have welcomed many Chinese customers to Sri Lanka, where they visit the famous gem cities of Beruwala, Ratnapura, and Galle. They walk through local gem markets, observe cutting workshops, and experience firsthand the traditions that have shaped our industry for centuries. Those visits often strengthen the trust that began at an exhibition table in Kunming.

As this year's expo drew to a close, I left Kunming with far more than business cards or new orders. I took home rekindled friendships, stronger partnerships, and a renewed sense of optimism for the future.

To me, the China-South Asia Expo is much more than an international trade fair. It is a living bridge that binds our two nations through commerce, craftsmanship, and people-to-people exchange. Each year, I return not only to display gemstones but also to continue a story handed down through generations — a story of trust, perseverance, and the belief that the strongest partnerships, like the finest gemstones, grow more precious with the passing years.

The author is a Sri Lankan businessman, trained gemologist, and gem cutter who has participated in the China-South Asia Expo multiple times.

From Sole to Soul

By Maitri Sharma

Since its establishment, the China-South Asia Expo has evolved into an important platform for promoting trade, investment, regional cooperation, and people-to-people exchange.

Visitors paused, smiled, and slipped on brightly embroidered Indian juttis (traditional shoes), admiring their vivid colors and intricate craftsmanship. Some pointed excitedly at the Chinese characters stitched into the fabric, while others took photos before making a purchase. At the 10th China-South Asia Expo in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, a stall showcasing traditional Indian footwear became one of the busiest attractions in the South Asia Pavilion.

In an exhibition with thousands of products — from advanced manufacturing equipment and green technologies to agricultural specialties and consumer goods — the handcrafted shoes stood out. Their appeal lay not in cutting-edge technology or commercial volume, but in the generations of craftsmanship and cultural heritage they embodied.

One pair, embroidered with the Chinese characters for "Beautiful Girl," attracted particular attention. Another pair, carrying the phrase "Drama Queen" in English, sparked laughter and conversation. The combination of Indian craftsmanship and familiar language transformed the shoes from simple fashion accessories into cultural conversation pieces.

CRAFTSMANSHIP MEETS CURIOSITY

Covering the China-South Asia Expo for the first time, I was struck by the sheer scale and diversity of the event. Spread across multiple exhibition halls, it brought together businesses, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and visitors from China and beyond, showcasing everything from agriculture and healthcare to technology, textiles, jewelry, handicrafts, and consumer goods.

Among the many pavilions, the Indian Pavilion stood out for its diversity. Shelves lined with aromatic spices, tea, incense sticks, garments, jewelry, handicrafts, and leather products reflected India's rich manufacturing and artisanal heritage. Yet it was the stall displaying handcrafted footwear that consistently drew the largest crowds.

Unlike mass-produced shoes, every pair showcased meticulous embroidery, vibrant colors, and techniques passed down through generations of artisans.

Visitors spent time comparing designs, inquiring about the embroidery, trying on different pairs, and discussing the meanings behind the stitched words.

Rather than altering the product's cultural identity, the embroidered Chinese characters served as a cultural bridge. They preserved the authenticity of Indian craftsmanship while making the designs instantly relatable to local consumers. "When we added Chinese characters to the designs, customers immediately became more interested because they felt a connection with the product," said Jeetendra Nirwan, an Indian exhibitor.

His observation illustrates an increasingly important lesson for exporters: Understanding local consumers can be as crucial as product quality itself. According to Nirwan, Chinese visitors appreciated both the handmade craftsmanship and the distinctive designs. Even by the second day of the exhibition, customer response had exceeded expectations. "I have participated in this expo several times before, and every year our expectations for sales rise," he said. "We are expecting bumper sales in the coming days."

Nirwan described the expo as an important platform where manufacturers and exporters can engage directly with buyers, better understand consumer preferences, and introduce Indian products to broader international markets. His experience reflects one of the greatest strengths of international exhibitions. Beyond generating immediate sales, they empower businesses to observe consumer behavior firsthand, test new ideas, and adapt products to different markets.

BEYOND BUSINESS

Nirwan's experience sheds light on the broader role the China-South Asia Expo has played over the past decade. Since its establishment, the expo has evolved into an important platform for promoting trade, investment, regional cooperation, and people-to-people exchange.

This year's six-day event attracted participants from 68 countries, regions, and international organizations, with more than 560 companies from South Asian countries showcasing products spanning manufacturing, agriculture, green development, technology, healthcare, and consumer goods. The figures underscore the expo's growing importance as one of the region's leading platforms for economic and cultural cooperation.

Yet a stroll through its exhibition halls reveals that the expo's greatest value cannot always be measured by signed contracts or announced trade volumes. Visitors ask artisans about embroidery techniques; exhibitors explain the stories behind handmade products; buyers encounter unfamiliar traditions through clothing, jewelry, tea, spices, and handicrafts. These conversations may last only a few minutes, yet they often become the first step toward understanding another culture. In this sense, commerce becomes a gateway to people-to-people exchange.

Monicca Tekchandani, another Indian exhibitor displaying short kurtis (blouses) and other apparel, shared a similar perspective. "It is a huge expo with many opportunities," she said. "Such platforms help businesses understand new markets and forge ties with people from around the world." Her experience echoed that of many exhibitors who viewed the expo not simply as a marketplace, but as an opportunity to build lasting relationships with overseas customers while introducing India's cultural heritage to new audience.

While browsing a rack of short kurtis in search of a top to pair with her *mamianqun* (horse-face skirt), a Chinese visitor said she has long been drawn to Indian clothing. "I've always liked Indian clothes, but these cropped kurtis are my favorite because



A grand entrance to the Indian Pavilion at the 10th China-South Asia Expo welcomes visitors from around the world. (Photo by Maitri Sharma)

they're comfortable for everyday wear and the fabric feels cool," she said. "I think they'll look really nice with my *mamianqun*. It's fun to mix Indian and Chinese styles."

The enthusiastic response at the expo suggests that heritage products, when thoughtfully presented and adapted to local audience, can resonate strongly beyond their country of origin. These purchases represented more than a commercial transaction: They were small moments of cultural exchange.

By the end of the second day, nearly 500 pairs of handcrafted Indian juttis had been sold — a bumper success for the exhibitors. Yet that number meant more than strong business. It underscored how platforms like the China-South Asia Expo help bring traditional products to global audience, enable businesses to understand new consumers, and showcase the culture and craftsmanship behind each item. From footwear and textiles to tea, spices, and jewelry, the expo continues to create avenues for businesses to reach new consumers, explore international markets, and grow beyond their home base.

The author is a reporter with *China-India Dialogue* who has been living and working in Beijing for 14 years.

China-South Asia Cooperation on Green Energy: Building Strategic Climate Resilience

By Beberg Baloch

Green energy transformation is the cornerstone of South Asia's long-term economic stability and climate security. Complementing China's industrial, technological, and cost advantages with South Asia's resource potential and infrastructure demands creates a sustainable regional development path.

Rapid economic expansion paired with severe climate vulnerability has posed systemic challenges across South Asia. Home to nearly a fourth of the world's population, the region faces extreme climate risks and structural energy security deficits. Meanwhile, China has established global leadership in renewable energy infrastructure, building over half of the world's newly installed renewable capacity in recent years. Integrating China's mature manufacturing, supply chain, and technological advantages with South Asia's untapped renewable potential provides a pragmatic, market-driven path to regional decarbonization, fiscal stabilization, and long-term climate resilience. The approach replaces the fossil fuel-dependent development model with tailored, technology-oriented solutions for South Asian nations.

South Asian economies are plagued by frequent climate disasters including catastrophic floods and erratic monsoons, which damage power infrastructure, curb

agricultural output, and place additional pressure on sovereign borrowing costs. Compounding ecological risks, heavy reliance on imported fossil fuels brings persistent economic fragility. Fluctuating global energy prices deplete foreign exchange reserves, worsen balance-of-payments deficits, and burden loss-making state power utilities. Despite solar and wind power being the cheapest new energy sources globally, South Asia's renewable deployment has been hindered by high capital costs, inadequate grid integration, and immature institutional frameworks. High risk premiums and sovereign debt constraints push up local renewable energy costs substantially while outdated power grids and unstable utility markets frustrate clean energy development, making external technical, supply chain, and financial support increasingly important.

DIVERSIFIED COOPERATION PRACTICES

China's domestic energy transition has built unparalleled industrial scale and cost advantages in clean energy sectors. Large-scale capital investment has delivered mature economies of scale, empowering Chinese wind turbines, energy storage systems, and solar modules to have prominent cost-performance advantages. This factor has been critical for cash-strapped South Asian countries, helping them cut levelized energy costs and realize financially viable renewable projects without excessive government subsidies. Beyond cost efficiency, China leads the entire clean tech value chain, covering photovoltaic processing, battery manufacturing, and ultra-high voltage transmission. South Asian nations can cooperate with Chinese enterprises to skip iterative grid upgrading processes and directly build digitized, integrated power ecosystems, with customized bilateral cooperation models adapting to each country's unique resource endowments and development needs.

In the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, bilateral energy cooperation has shifted from early coal-fired power construction to low-carbon infrastructure development. Hydropower projects including Karot and Kohala stations have adopted Chinese climate-adaptive engineering to cope with monsoon fluctuations and seismic risks and ensure a stable low-carbon power supply. To reduce Pakistan's reliance on expensive imported fossil fuels, the two sides are jointly promoting the phase-out and renovation of inefficient coal plants matched with large-scale solar and storage projects to stabilize electricity tariffs. Meanwhile, the Matiari-Lahore high-voltage transmission project has solved the regional power generation-consumption mismatch, efficiently transporting renewable energy from southern hubs to northern demand centers. Equipped with intelligent substation systems, the modern grid effectively avoids large-scale blackouts caused by extreme weather, greatly enhancing national energy stability.

Bangladesh's high population density and limited land resources restrict construction of large-scale onshore solar power plants. To address this bottleneck, Chinese enterprises have carried out innovative cooperation on floating photovoltaic projects, making full use of water resources while improving power generation efficiency through water cooling. Targeting Bangladesh's export-oriented manufacturing industries that face global carbon tariffs, Chinese developers have deployed distributed rooftop solar systems in industrial zones to maintain local industrial competitiveness. Supported by Chinese intelligent substation and smart distribution technologies, Bangladesh is accelerating grid modernization to adapt to the large-scale integration of variable renewable energy and prevent grid collapse.

Landlocked Nepal and

Bhutan boast abundant hydropower resources but lack the capital and technical capabilities for large-scale development. Chinese firms are providing professional high-altitude engineering solutions, adopting advanced sediment management and specialized turbine designs to adapt to complex glacial geological environments. Cross-border high-voltage transmission interconnection projects are facilitating seasonal power balancing: Nepal exports surplus hydropower in rainy seasons and imports stable power in dry seasons, boosting regional grid stability. With Chinese remote sensing and early-warning technologies, local hydropower facilities can effectively respond to glacial lake outburst floods, turning vulnerable hydropower resources into reliable regional energy assets.

After severe macroeconomic shocks, Sri Lanka is accelerating renewable energy transformation to improve its balance of payments. Excellent wind energy potential is found in the Mannar Basin on its northern coast, where Chinese manufacturers have deployed low-speed wind turbines adapted to tropical marine environments. Aligning with Sri Lanka's shift to competitive power bidding mechanisms, Chinese institutions adopted blended finance and joint venture models, providing a replicable solution for capital-constrained island nations. Additionally, both sides are exploring localized green hydrogen production, converting surplus offshore wind energy into storable hydrogen to decarbonize maritime and heavy industries, to solve the island grid's energy storage dilemma and advance the national net-zero agenda.

BOOSTING REGIONAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Genuine climate resilience requires green energy infrastructure to withstand extreme climate challenges via targeted technical adaptation and stable grid operation. Coastal renewable facilities need anti-corrosion and wind-resistant designs while Himalayan power assets rely on flood early-warning and reinforcement systems. As variable renewable energy penetration rises across South Asia, grid stability has become the core development bottleneck. Chinese battery energy storage systems and intelligent energy management technologies provide frequency regulation, peak shaving, and load forecasting functions, helping regional grids absorb large-scale solar and wind power safely and avoid systemic failures. The energy system is closely linked with water and food security: Renewable-energy-powered water pumps reduce agricultural emissions and stabilize grain production while smart water management technologies prevent excessive groundwater extraction, protecting rural livelihoods and regional ecological balance.

Institutional, financial, and geopolitical challenges continue to hinder the expansion of green energy cooperation in South Asia. High inflation, currency volatility, and utility tariff deficits weaken project bankability. To address these issues, bilateral cooperation has adopted non-recourse project financing, local currency settlement, and multilateral guaranteed blended finance to reduce risk premiums and attract private capital. Furthermore, long-term industrial resilience requires shifting from simple equipment import to localized development. Building joint assembly factories and carrying out systematic technical training can cultivate local professional teams, improve regional independent operation and maintenance capabilities, and avoid supply chain shocks.

South Asian countries uphold open and diversified energy cooperation strategies to maintain strategic autonomy. Combining Chinese advanced manufacturing and grid technologies with Western development funds helps maximize investment inflows.



As one of the key industrial parks of Hainan Free Trade Port, Jiangdong New Area in Haikou serves as a vital window for the world to observe the opening-up efforts of China. (Photo by Yuan Chen/*Hainan Daily*)

Meanwhile, standardized regional grid construction and cross-border power interconnection can improve the allocation of clean energy resources. Sound domestic institutional environments are also essential. Transparent investment protection policies, streamlined approval procedures, and flexible tariff mechanisms can effectively attract global high-quality investment. With rich experience in cross-border infrastructure construction, Chinese enterprises can help deliver projects more efficiently as regulatory frameworks improve.

Ultimately, green energy transformation is the cornerstone of South Asia's long-term economic stability and climate security. In the context of intensifying global climate change, green energy infrastructure has become a core pillar of national macroeconomic resilience rather than a mere environmental tool. Complementing China's industrial, technological, and cost advantages with South Asia's resource potential and infrastructure demands creates a sustainable regional development path. Despite financial, institutional, and geopolitical complexities, standardized, transparent and market-oriented China-South Asia green energy cooperation will continuously enhance regional climate resilience and support long-term stable and sustainable economic development in South Asia.

The author is the assistant editor of *Daily Balochistan Express* based in Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

Falling GDP Rank: How Long Can India's Growth Story Last?

By Ning Shengnan

India still has considerable ground to cover before it can live up to its billing as a global growth engine.

On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched military strikes against Iran, igniting a conflict that lasted over 100 days and sent ripples across the global economy. India, despite its close ties to all three key players — the United States, Israel, and Iran, was not a direct party in the conflict and initially seemed relatively shielded from its spillover effects. However, contrary to expectations, the country was hit hard by the ensuing economic turmoil, raising doubts on its narrative of rapid ascent as the world's fourth-largest economy.

DIRECT IMPACTS

First, the conflict triggered temporary energy

shortages. India's energy supply is highly import-dependent. As the world's third-largest crude oil consumer, India imports roughly 88 percent of its crude oil, 50 percent of its natural gas, and 60 percent of its domestically consumed liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). Crucially, nearly 45 percent of its imported crude, 50 percent of its liquefied natural gas (LNG), and about 90 percent of its LPG are shipped through the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict heightened transit risks in the strait, disrupting shipping lanes and causing insurance premiums through the roof. This led to a drop in actual port arrivals, creating temporary supply gaps in India's energy market. Driven by domestic political and livelihood concerns, the Indian government prioritized household gas and transport fuel, which in turn resulted in energy shortages for several industrial sectors.

Second, the crisis hit India's primary source of foreign exchange — migrant workers' remittances. India is the world's largest recipient of inward remittances, which serve as a financial lifeline for consumer spending in millions of households. According to data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the country's central bank, remittances reached US$135.46 billion in fiscal year 2024-2025, with roughly 40 percent originating from Gulf nations such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. The conflict disrupted economic activity across the Gulf, curbing regional investment and labor demand. This in turn squeezed job opportunities for Indian migrant workers, reducing employment levels, lowering wages, and ultimately shrinking the volume of funds sent back home.

Finally, on the trade and supply chain front, the Middle East serves as a critical export market for India. The fighting caused India's export orders to Gulf nations to suffer a sharp collapse in the short term. Furthermore, because a large portion of India's international freight relies on Gulf hubs for transit, the conflict exposed some industries to supply chain disruptions. India's gem and jewelry sector — a cornerstone of its export economy — was one of them. The Gulf is a major consumer market for these luxury goods, and cities like Dubai act as traditional trading and transit hubs. Logistics bottlenecks left domestic processors deprived of raw materials and unable to ship out finished goods, resulting in severe delays in trade payment flows and capital recovery.

The fallout of the US-Israel-Iran conflict extended far beyond initial energy gaps, dwindling remittances, and supply chain bottlenecks. Consequently, it exerted significant pressure on India's domestic prices, exchange rates, and public finances.

MOUNTING PRESSURES ON PRICES AND PUBLIC FINANCES

Viewed from a macroeconomic perspective, the fallout of the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict extended far beyond initial energy gaps, dwindling remittances, and supply chain bottlenecks. Consequently, it exerted significant pressure on India's domestic prices, exchange rates, and public finances.

Historically, energy costs have been the primary driver of India's price levels, and inflation has persistently remained the Achilles' heel of its economy. Nearly every global oil crisis



Old Delhi streets crisscross with shops and markets lining both sides. (Photo from VCG)

has battered India, dragging its economy into turbulent waters. The Gulf War in the early 1990s, for instance, left the country with barely enough foreign reserves to cover two to three weeks of imports, forcing the central bank to airlift its gold reserves overseas as collateral for emergency financing. The recent U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict again exposed this vulnerability to imported inflation. Spikes in international crude quickly passed through to domestic fuel prices. Since India's logistics network relies heavily on diesel-powered road transport, rising fuel costs pushed up logistics expenses, which in turn inflated the prices of food and everyday necessities, amplifying overall inflation. Consequently, the RBI revised its inflation forecast for fiscal year 2026-2027 upward to 5.1 percent.

The surge in oil import costs has also widened the trade deficit and battered the rupee, compounding the depreciation pressures that had been building since last year. In late May, the U.S. dollar-Indian rupee exchange rate briefly hit a record high of 96.5. This depreciation set off a self-reinforcing feedback loop: First, a weaker rupee raised the cost of essential imports like fuel, further widening the trade gap; Second, the rupee's slide undermined foreign investor confidence, sparking a sell-off in domestic equities and bonds as capital fled to the safety of the U.S. dollar, which in turn added even more downward pressure on the rupee.

On the fiscal front, the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict directly raised government expenditure on fuel and fertilizer subsidies, owing to high oil prices and supply disruptions. Subsequently, the depreciation of the

rupee, together with rising external financing costs — driven by the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to keep interest rates higher for longer — placed greater pressure on India's public finances.

TESTING INDIA'S HIGH GROWTH

The preliminary agreement between Washington and Tehran suggests that the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict may be heading toward de-escalation, with the Strait of Hormuz also expected to resume normal operations. As a result, the near-term pressures facing the Indian economy may gradually ease, leading to lower inflation, greater rupee stability, and a modest improvement in growth prospects.

However, the conflict once again exposed the fragility underpinning India's high-growth narrative. Over recent years, the Modi administration has actively advanced the proposition that its domestic reform agenda, coupled with the "strategic window of opportunity" afforded by intensifying U.S.-China competition, has placed the economy on a sustained high-growth trajectory. Within this narrative framework, India's ascent to the world's fourth-largest economy appeared inevitable, while its ambition to reach developed-economy status by 2047 no longer seemed unattainable.

Yet despite India's impressive headline growth figures, significant structural weaknesses remain, including inadequate industrialization, a persistent shortfall in employment generation, and unstable sources of growth.

In fact, even prior to the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict, the "Trump tariff storm" of 2025 had already exposed the fragility of India's economic momentum.

In April 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled "reciprocal tariffs" worldwide. Tariffs on Indian goods were raised from 25 percent to 50 percent —driven by Trump's displeasure over New Delhi's continued purchase of Russian oil — making India one of the most heavily taxed suppliers to the U.S. market. These punitive tariffs dealt a heavy blow to India's export to the U.S. At the same time, concerns over stretched asset valuations triggered a reversal of the foreign portfolio inflows that had previously surged into Indian markets. The ensuing capital outflows exerted further depreciation pressure on the rupee, which became one of Asia's worst-performing currencies that year. Western media outlets, which had long viewed India as a rising economic powerhouse, also began to pivot their attention toward the country's internal economic fragilities.

As a major emerging economy of 1.4 billion people, India undoubtedly possesses considerable economic resilience and remains one of the few large economies still registering mid-to-high growth rates. However, the country has yet to realize the rapid, manufacturing-driven growth envisioned by the Modi administration. Instead, it continues to rely primarily on its traditional consumption- and services-oriented growth model, while many key indicators still fall short of the levels seen during the 2003-2011 boom period. If India aspires to become a true engine of global growth, it still has considerable ground to cover.

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China-U.S. Summit: Why the Xi-Trump Meeting Matters for the Global Economy

By Devinder Kumar

The world economy depends largely on the economic health and stability of these two nations.

As the international system faces rising geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and supply chain disruptions, the recent meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Donald Trump during Trump's visit to Beijing from May 13 to 15 attracted enormous global attention. The summit was not merely a high-level diplomatic engagement between two major countries but also an important attempt to stabilize global economic and political relations during a highly uncertain period.

The discussions between the two leaders focused on strategic communication, economic cooperation, trade relations, and the importance of avoiding confrontation between the world's two largest economies. Stable relations between Beijing and Washington are not only beneficial for the two countries themselves but are also essential for the stability of the global economy.

STRATEGIC STABILITY BETWEEN MAJOR POWERS

President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of "building a constructive China-U.S. relationship of strategic stability." Xi said that the "constructive strategic stability" should be a positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay, a sound stability with moderate competition, a constant stability with manageable differences, and an enduring stability with promises of peace. This message was seen as a reflection of China's broader diplomatic approach, which emphasizes multilateralism, economic cooperation, and global stability.

One of the major outcomes of the summit was the improvement in communication channels. Both countries agreed to strengthen exchange in areas such as trade, agriculture, tourism, public health, and people-to-people interactions.

Analysts viewed these developments as positive signals after years of tensions and uncertainty in bilateral relations.

Trade and economic cooperation emerged as one of the central themes of the summit. Both countries are willing to reduce tensions and find practical solutions to economic disagreements.

This aspect of the summit is especially important because the economic relationship between China and the United States has enormous implications for the entire world. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the U.S. economy is estimated to exceed US$32 trillion in 2026 while China's economy stands at over US$20 trillion. Together, the two countries will account for over 42 percent of global nominal GDP. In other words, the world economy depends largely on the economic health and stability of these two nations.

GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY DURING INTERNATIONAL CRISIS

Because of this reality, China-U.S. relations affect global markets almost immediately. When trade disputes intensify, supply chains become unstable, investor confidence weakens, manufacturing slows, and international trade faces uncertainty.

The timing of the summit also contributed to its significance. The world is currently facing several major challenges simultaneously. Ongoing regional conflicts continue to create instability in energy markets and international trade routes. Inflationary pressures remain a concern in many economies. Climate change, food security concerns, and technological competition are also shaping international relations.

In such an environment, any improvement in China-U.S. relations has global importance. Although China and the U.S. continue to navigate competition in several strategic areas, the summit suggests that both countries recognize the importance of maintaining communication and avoiding confrontation.

FOR INDIA: OPPORTUNITIES OVER CHALLENGES

Beyond the bilateral relationship itself, the summit also has broader implications for emerging economies including India. For India, a more stable China-U.S. relationship may create several important opportunities.

Today, India is one of the world's fastest-growing major economies and an increasingly important global player. It maintains strong strategic and economic relations with the U.S. while also sharing deep economic and regional connections with China. Although India and China have experienced tensions in recent years, both countries remain major Asian economies with significant trade links and regional influence.

If China and the U.S. move toward greater stability and cooperation, India could benefit from a more predictable international economic environment, which may create favorable conditions for India's manufacturing sector, export industries, technology partnerships, and infrastructure development. India could also find opportunities to play a balancing or bridging role in the evolving international system. As a country that maintains close economic relations with both the U.S. and China, India could seek to play a bigger role in regional cooperation initiatives, economic connectivity projects, and multilateral dialogue platforms.

Ultimately, the Xi-Trump meeting highlighted a broader 21st-century reality: Global prosperity, economic recovery, and international stability increasingly depend on cooperation among major economies. In this context, the future of China-U.S. relations will continue to influence not only bilateral ties, but also the direction of the global economy.

The author is an Indian journalist with *China-India Dialogue*.

Trump's China Visit: **The Architecture of Global Power**

By Abhishek G Bhaya

The Xi-Trump meeting represents what many strategic observers describe as a calibrated attempt at stabilization amid intensifying competition.

The state visit of U.S. President Donald Trump to Beijing came at a moment of rare geopolitical convergence, where economic interdependence, strategic competition, and regional conflict were intersecting in ways that could reshape global power equations.

For India and the broader Asian region, the stakes of this visit extended well beyond China-U.S. relations. They touched the foundations of energy security, maritime stability, and the evolving balance of power within a rapidly fragmenting global order.

TACTICAL ENGAGEMENT IN COMPETITION

The Xi-Trump meeting represents what many strategic observers describe as a calibrated attempt at stabilization amid intensifying competition.

The economic dimension reinforces this assessment. Despite tariffs, sanctions, and technology decoupling measures by the U.S., bilateral trade between the United States and China still totaled 4.01 trillion yuan (US$575 billion) in 2025. In comparison, India-U.S. bilateral trade stood at around



The Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests is located at the center of Beijing's historic Temple of Heaven. Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Donald Trump visited the site on May 14, 2026. (Photo from CFB)

US$150 billion in 2025, while India-China trade surged to a record of US$156 billion during the same period. Together, these figures reflect India's growing yet still comparatively small economic footprint, as well as New Delhi's deepening economic interdependence with both major powers.

This asymmetry explains why Washington cannot fully disengage from Beijing without risking disruptions to global supply chains, rare earth flows, and financial stability.

IRAN, HORMUZ, AND THE ENERGY SECURITY EQUATION

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow maritime passage, accounts for a significant share of global oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments. It is one of the most strategically sensitive chokepoints in the world. Some Indian scholars believe that China's influence over Iran is based not only on economic ties but also on sustained diplomatic engagement.

For India, the stakes are direct and immediate. Nearly 40 percent of its crude oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Any sustained disruption would trigger inflationary pressures, higher shipping insurance costs, and macroeconomic volatility.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC POSITION

A key question raised by the Xi-Trump meeting is its impact on India's strategic positioning. India is unlikely to view any China-U.S. thaw as a structural shift. Instead, India will interpret it as a tactical adjustment.

India's approach remains anchored in strategic autonomy and what has increasingly been described as "multi-alignment diplomacy." This involves simultaneous engagement with different major powers, including the United States, China, Russia, and multilateral platforms such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The Xi-Trump meeting in Beijing represents a critical inflection point in global landscape, but not a transformation of underlying dynamics. It is best understood as an attempt to manage competition. Trade tensions and technological competition are likely to persist. Yet areas of pragmatic cooperation may emerge as necessary stabilizers in an increasingly volatile global system.

For India, the key challenge is navigating this evolving equilibrium without overdependence on any single power center. As some scholars put it, India's strategic posture is shaped by realism: Engage where possible, show autonomy where necessary, and use caution when power politics intensifies.

In an era defined by a fragmented order, the Xi-Trump meeting may not reshape the world, but it will certainly show some of the contours of the world that is emerging.

The author is a senior Indian journalist and an international affairs analyst.

Insider Out

By Liu Chang

A poll conducted in July 2025 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, a U.S. think tank, showed that 53 percent of Americans favor friendly cooperation with China, signaling a positive rebound for the first time in five years.

Originating from Sichuan Province, the mouthwatering dish Kung Pao Chicken is consistently a favorite on Chinese takeout menus globally. Mark Levine compared his various roles in China to the dish featuring diced chicken, peanuts, and chili peppers.

"If you ask somebody 'what do you like about Kung Pao Chicken?,' replies will include 'Chicken is my favorite meat,' 'Peanuts are wonderful!' 'I can't eat it without spicy peppers,'" laughed the American laureate of the Chinese Government Friendship Award. "But generally people like Kung Pao Chicken as a whole."

"Likewise, I love all of my life in China," he added. "If I were to give up part of that, my life wouldn't be the same."

A VETERAN SLASHER

Levine's apartment near Minzu University of China has evolved into a living museum of his life there. The entire space is dotted with hats worn by China's 55 ethnic minority groups flanked by musical scores and books about China. The style fits his identity as a slasher, since his work has involved so many "/" symbols.

A partnership with Minzu University of China since 2007 has empowered Levine to learn about the country and its culture as well as the embedded diversity. He considered acceptance of the offer to be "one of the best decisions ever made in life."

In 2023, Levine made his first visit to Kashi (Kashgar) City, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, arranged by the university and local authorities. Seeing grapes grown on raised, flat-topped wooden trellises or arbors as part of poverty alleviation efforts impressed him a lot. The subsidized "lattice" canopies protect



During the 31st World Table Tennis Championships in 1971, American athlete Glenn Cowan accepted gifts from his Chinese counterpart Zhuang Zedong. (Photo by Huang Taopeng/*China Pictorial*)

grapes from the scorching desert sun with the vital shade.

"Everywhere we went, we also saw signs, whether government, business, or other signs, displayed not only in Chinese but also in Uygur script," said Levine, wearing a gifted Uygur shirt made in the ancient city. "We visited a primary school where children are taught by two teachers, one speaking Chinese and the other speaking Uygur."

"In the U.S., we don't really have a clear understanding of China as a multi-ethnic country," he added while demonstrating a fist bump. "And to whatever extent, when the media make reference to China as having multiple ethnicities, they usually discuss it as some kind of conflict in between."

Levine considers sharing China stories to be the best "headline buster." In his classes on public speaking, Levine assigns students to deliver speeches on three topics that they believe foreigners should know about China. If he had to do the assignment himself, alongside ethnic diversity, Levine would highlight how hospitality and leapfrog development exist in China.

When he is out and about and the ride-hailing Didi app fails due to dysfunctional GPS location tracking, Levine usually receives generous help from passers-by on the street. "They tell the driver the exact location while emphasizing 'lao wai da hu zi (meaning a bearded foreigner),' and then the car shows up," he smirked.

Levine has attended the university's graduation ceremony for years, but he almost never saw parents there until the past couple of years. "What does the fact that more parents show up at graduation ceremonies disclose?" he asked rhetorically. "Two things: More money and more convenient transportation."

Back in 2005, Levine rode in a car to Huai'an City, Jiangsu



A painting in Mark Levine's apartment depicting the musical duo "In Side Out," featuring Mark Levine and Chinese *erhu* artist Fu Han. (Photo by Xu Luoyuan)

Province, from Beijing. He still has vivid memories of being surrounded by people on bicycles, which was interestingly described as "bicycle mountain, bicycle sea."

Since 2010, Levine has been devoted to organizing lectures themed around "They Helped Build New China" at the university. The eight speakers were foreigners who had come to China between the 1930s and 1960s as medical professionals, teachers, or journalists, or their next generation.

Sidney Shapiro and Michael Crook, the son of Isabel Crook, were on the list: Shapiro lived in China from 1947 and worked as an author and translator while serving multiple terms as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and Isabel Crook was a co-founder of foreign language education in the People's Republic of China, who extensively documented the socio-economic transformations of China's peasantry.

Later, the series was expanded into an actual class called "Foreign Friends of the Chinese Revolution" at the School of Journalism and Communication at Peking University, with 14 speakers invited. Last year, Levine launched another series by enrolling nine Beijing-based laureates of the Chinese Government Friendship Award in conjunction with the Beijing Overseas Talents Center.

The goal of the lectures is to teach people about the contributions China has received across the country's history. "Actually, whenever I hear of the 'reform and opening up policy' that commenced nearly half a century ago, I always respond, 'China has always been open to friends," Levine said.

"Singing my China stories to the world" is engraved on Levine's guitar strap, echoing his saying "China is akin to a thick musical score." Some of his most notable compositions include "Huai'an — Promise of the Future" about his first destination in China, which was also Premier Zhou Enlai's hometown, "Three Cheers for the Volunteers" about the 2008 Summer Olympics, and "The Ones They Call Beipiao," on his feelings about living in Beijing.

"The *bei*, it stands for Beijing, where we come to find our way.

And *piao* is like some rootless plants that on the water lay.

But once we've made that journey, here is where we will stay

As in Beijing we give it all to get to our new day," go the lyrics.

Levine also plays in a musical duo called "In Side Out" with Chinese *erhu* (two-stringed bowed musical instrument) artist Fu Han. Their recent partnership produced a 40-minute show with eleven songs performed on May 4 at Chaoyang Park during the Beijing Juicy Burger Fest 2026.

"The inside and outside of my shirt can refer to the younger Chinese lady and older American man in the duo, or the Chinese instrument *erhu* she plays and the western guitar I play, or the different education we

received," Levine explained while flipping his shirt sleeve. "But it's one shirt, so it's a single thing with two sides to it."

"Our Chinese name 'Xiu Wai Hui Zhong' literally translates as 'beautiful on the outside and intelligent on the inside,'" he added. "But there are more connotations since the 'Wai' and 'Zhong' can also refer to 'foreign' and 'Chinese' respectively."

Levine has authored two books, *Stories from My Chinese Journey* and *Singing My China Stories to the World*, featuring anecdotes about his time in China. Episodes within include toasting with Zhou Bingde, Premier Zhou Enlai's niece, at the Huai'an Business Club Spring Festival dinner in Beijing in 2010, getting a Chinese driver's license with on-site interpretation from a Chinese student and 96 out of 100 points scored in the test, and performing in Chinese comedy drama *Gasp* (2009) starring comedian Ge You.

PROMISE OF THE FUTURE

A poll conducted in July 2025 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, a U.S. think tank, showed that 53 percent of Americans favor friendly cooperation with China, signaling a positive rebound for the first time in five years.

The hope of the China-U.S. relationship lies in the people, its foundation is in our societies, its future depends on the youth, and its vitality comes from exchange at subnational levels, said Chinese President Xi Jinping in a speech titled "Galvanizing Our Peoples into a Strong Force for the Cause of China-U.S. Friendship" at a welcome dinner organized by friendly organizations in the United States in November 2023.

This year, U.S. President Donald Trump made a state visit to China from May 13 to 15, the first U.S. presidential visit to China in nine years and Trump's second since November 2017. It also marks the 55th anniversary of China-U.S. Ping-Pong Diplomacy, which famously thawed tensions in 1971 when the U.S. table tennis team visited China. What possible "baby steps" could be taken to kindle a "giant leap" in the new era?

"While the poll may be reflective of some change, I believe what is truly needed is for Americans to come to China, meet people, travel around, and see China for themselves," Levine said. "Then when they hear misinformation about China after coming back, they can confidently say 'That is not what I saw' or 'That is not what the Chinese people I spoke with told me.'"

The initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2023 to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs over the next five years has been effectively implemented according to a think tank report released in April 2026.

Titled "Study in China: Contributing to the Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity," it showed that as of early December 2025, over 42,000 young Americans had arrived in China under this initiative. The participants represented more than 500 schools and institutions across all 50 U.S. states and Washington D.C., with their itineraries spanning 31 provincial-level regions as well as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Macao Special Administrative Region.

For Levine, short visits are also welcome. He cited the Yale Whiffenpoofs, the world's most time-honored and renowned collegiate a cappella group. The 14-member group of graduating Yale seniors traveled across multiple cities in China to foster cross-cultural exchange through music during a 15-day tour this year.

When performing in Beijing, they joined students from Beijing Normal University to sing "Let the World Be Filled with Love." They also surprised tourists and locals by spontaneously singing the classic Chinese folk song "Jasmine Flower (Mo Li Hua)" on the 897-meter-long escalator inside the Tianmen Mountain scenic area in Zhangjiajie City, Hunan Province.

"What a beautiful jasmine flower! Fragrant and beautiful, filling up the branches. It's fragrant and white, and praiseworthy!" they sang.

"Mo Li Hua (tea), I like it," Levine exclaimed while sipping the Chinese tea.

Medical-grade Friendship

By Liu Chang

A systematic approach honed by medical training has helped Zafar better analyze the social development of China and its interaction with Pakistan.

While observing how thin, sterile needles were inserted into specific body points to balance energy flow along meridians, Zafar Uddin Mahmood frequently jotted notes in class.

"Interestingly, I was one of the first groups of students after the resumption of the Chinese college entrance examination," beamed the special representative of the prime minister of Pakistan on China affairs. "I studied general medicine at the Sun Yat-sen Medical College from 1977 to 1982, which later was merged into Sun Yat-Sen University."

In December 2024, Zafar took a special journey back after registering as a proud member of the university's alumni association. "I'm making efforts to promote cooperation between Chinese and Pakistani medical schools and plan to introduce China's public health experience to remote areas of Pakistan," he added.

CHINA PICTORIAL

Farmers laboring in the fields, factories churning, and people working together with Chairman Mao Zedong...Vivid images



Zafar Uddin Mahmood (fourth left) receives the Friendship Envoy Award at the second Orchid Awards in July 2025. The development of the Orchid Awards activities was included in the outline of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) in March 2026. (Photo courtesy of the Orchid Awards Secretariat)

popped into Zafar's mind while he recalled first flipping through "a very beautiful colored pictorial magazine."

Back in 1975, Zafar regularly received the Urdu version of *China Pictorial* from a local distributor. While his knowledge about China was enhanced through reading, the high school student realized that a single magazine would still not provide a deep-enough understanding of a country. A successful application for a government scholarship helped him land in China in 1976 to begin learning Chinese language.

After college graduation, Zafar didn't pursue a career with the acquired medical knowledge and instead took a job in an international bank to continue his stay in China as a witness to the historic opening up and economic reforms.

A systematic approach honed by medical training has helped Zafar better analyze the social development of China and its interaction with Pakistan as the former Economic and Commercial Counselor at the embassy of Pakistan in Beijing, the first Consul General of Pakistan in Shanghai, and the former Special Envoy for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), successively.

As an observer of how CPEC has transformed from a blueprint into various projects, Zafar expounded on its role in filling Pakistan's energy shortage.

Located in Sahiwal in Punjab Province, Pakistan, the Sahiwal coal-fired power plant, the first project completed under the CPEC, officially began operation in 2017 as a major source of energy and employment in Pakistan with installed capacity of 1,320 megawatts. "When the project launched, Pakistan was facing a serious energy shortage," Zafar recalled. "In big cities like Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, we grappled with blackouts lasting as long as 12



Zafar Uddin Mahmood (right) speaks with a fellow participant during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in March 2026. (Photo by Duan Wei/*China Pictorial*)

hours, and in the countryside it was even worse."

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan. On this occasion, the high-quality development of CPEC 2.0 needs to pivot towards "small yet smart" livelihood programs, according to Zafar.

"Over the past few years, a large number of Pakistani population has used solar energy not only for their houses, but also for factories, hospitals, and schools," he said. "It has been a great achievement in reducing global warming thanks to China-made affordable solar panels."

As the policy advisor to the secretary-general of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA), Zafar's connection to the forum has spanned over two decades. Describing himself to be "very lucky" to have the opportunity of attending the first BFA annual conference in 2002 as part of the embassy team, he noted that the BFA has become a calling card for Hainan Province and its opening up with the strong momentum of the Hainan Free Trade Port that opened on December 18, 2025.

According to a flagship report released at this year's BFA annual conference in March, among 29 key categories of intermediate goods representing over 85 percent of global parts and components trade, Asia remains the world's primary supply center and manufacturing hub. Notably, China leads in 19 out of 22 categories of products within Asia's global value chains.

ORCHID ENVOY

In China, orchids hold a revered spot as one of the "Four Gentlemen" of traditional art and literature. Representing Confucian virtues, they symbolize a scholar's moral uprightness, purity, and quiet grace.

In July 2025, Zafar was officially recognized as an



A portrait of Zafar Uddin Mahmood created in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, in November 1979. (Photo courtesy of Zafar Uddin Mahmood)

orchid envoy, bestowed the Friendship Envoy Award at the second Orchid Awards for his contributions to promoting the friendship between Pakistan and China.

"Jasmine is the national flower of Pakistan," Zafar grinned. "It would also not be a bad idea to launch the Jasmine Awards for the Understanding China Forum in Pakistan."

When Zafar attended the first Understanding China Conference in Beijing back in November 2013, he realized that introducing China to the world is essential, especially its unique national governance system.

"Understanding China is not difficult at all," Zafar said. "The thing is, you need an open mind."

In 2019, Zafar registered the Understanding China Forum (UCF) in Lahore, Pakistan, as a non-partisan platform dedicated to promoting all dimensions of Pakistan-China bilateral relations. Now, the UCF is partnering with the Beaconhouse National University Center for Policy Research to work on a kaleidoscope of activities. This February, a digital Chinese art workshop named Hans Pixels and the Chinese Tales Corner were both organized there.

The 2025 Understanding China Conference presented two new tasks for "understanding China," namely understanding the Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and comprehending the four global initiatives proposed by China.

From Zafar's perspective, China's focus has changed from quantity of development to quality and hence science and technology innovation and green development are two important aspects. To move the world forward in a harmonious and inclusive manner, the four global initiatives, designed to work as a synergistic ecosystem, should be followed as well.

Speaking about Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, the venue of the 2025 conference, Zafar was eager to share another special link.

"After I became the chief representative of the bank's Guangzhou office, my twin boys were born there in 1991," he laughed. "My sons' passports state that their place of birth is Guangzhou."

From Pinyin to the Chinese Bridge: A Journey of Language, Culture, and Connection

By Anshika Chouhan (唐晨曦)

For me, Mandarin has never been merely a language. It has been a bridge connecting people, cultures, and two ancient civilizations with so much to learn from one another.

"大家好! (Hello, everyone!)" These three simple syllables changed my life in ways I could never have imagined. Long before I ever set foot on the Chinese Bridge stage, they marked the beginning of my journey with Mandarin.

My passion for languages deepened considerably during my secondary school years. What first attracted me wasn't a textbook or an exam — it was Chinese dramas. What began as entertainment slowly ripened into curiosity, and curiosity quickly matured into passion.

Like many young people, I started watching dramas simply because I enjoyed them. But before long, I found myself fascinated by the language itself.

Whenever I heard an interesting sentence, I would pause, replay, and repeat it over and over. Sometimes I repeated a single line so many times that I nearly memorized the whole dialogue. I wanted to sound exactly like the actors.

Even today, I'm often asked about my pronunciation and accent. People are usually surprised to learn that Chinese dramas are one of my most important learning tools.

Of course, learning Mandarin was not always easy. At first, Chinese characters looked impossible to understand, and I knew

very little about the language. Unlike languages that use alphabets, every character seemed like a world of its own. There were also tones to master, pronunciation to improve, and moments of frustration.

But I learned something important: Progress does not happen all at once. It happens character by character, sentence by sentence, and conversation by conversation.

As my interest grew, I began studying at the India China Academy, where dedicated teachers helped me turn that curiosity into a genuine passion for Mandarin and Chinese culture.

AN UNBELIEVABLE COMPETITION

Looking back, those three simple syllables were the first step in a journey that eventually led me to the Chinese Bridge stage. If someone had told me then that I would one day stand on stage speaking Mandarin, win the Chinese Bridge Competition India Finals for college students, and represent India at the Global Finals in China, I would have found it hard to believe.

When people look at the photographs from the India Finals of the Chinese Bridge Competition, held on May 23, 2026, they see the smiles, the stage, and the trophy. But what they don't see is the sweat and effort behind those moments.

I remember practicing my speech repeatedly until my throat grew sore. I would drink some water, take a short break, and then start all over from the first sentence.

The online round took place on May 10. I was extremely nervous. Just moments before I was due to speak, I sent a message to my teacher, Nishith Shah, the principal and founder of the India China Academy.

"老师 (Teacher), I'm so nervous."

His reply came back simple: "That's exactly what I don't want you to be. You have prepared well. You have practiced well. Just give it your best." Those words stayed with me.

Confidence comes from within. But it can also come from those who believe in us before we believe in ourselves.

The online round was even more challenging, as I had an exam the very next day. After the competition, I spent the night preparing for it. It was exhausting, but it reminded me just how much this opportunity meant to me.

One of my favorite memories from the Chinese Bridge took place even before the competition began. The day before the finals, our teacher held a meeting for the contestants. We were supposed to talk about the competition, but soon we were sharing stories, laughing, joking, and encouraging each other. Although we were all nervous, we somehow made each other feel at ease. Those moments of friendship were just as precious to me as the competition itself. Such experiences reminded me that learning Mandarin was never just about mastering vocabulary or grammar — it was also about understanding people, cultures, and perspectives beyond my own.

CROSS-CULTURAL LINKS

I am fascinated by Mandarin because it is so much more than a language. Every character seems to carry history, culture, and meaning within itself. Learning the language often feels like uncovering stories hidden in the words.

One example I often think of is the character "家" (jiā), which means "home" or "family." It appears in the phrase "大家好" — the very phrase that welcomed me into the world of Chinese.

The idea reminds me, as an Indian, of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, an ancient Indian philosophy that means "the world is one family." Although India and China have different languages and traditions, both cultures place great importance on family, education, respect, and human connection.

The more I learned Mandarin, the more similarities I discovered.

By learning Mandarin, I also gained a deeper understanding of Chinese

culture and values. I came to appreciate key virtues like perseverance, respect for learning, and the preservation of cultural traditions. One cultural practice that left a deep impression on me was incense seal art.

Its process is slow, careful, and meditative. In a world where everything moves quickly, it teaches me the beauty of patience and attention to detail. It reminds me that the most meaningful experiences often cannot be rushed.

Another joyful part of my journey has been making Chinese friends on the HelloTalk app. They patiently corrected my tones, taught me more natural expressions, and helped me gain confidence in speaking. More than that, our discussions often turned into cultural exchanges.

Whenever I asked them about India, many would immediately name films such as *3 Idiots*, *Dangal*, and *Baahubali*. Some even knew old Bollywood songs, while others talked enthusiastically about Indian food.

On the other hand, my Chinese friends have often asked me whether Indians really eat with their hands. I would usually laugh and explain that many of us do. What I enjoyed most wasn't the answer itself, but the conversation that followed. In those moments, I realized that we were all curious about each other's lives. A simple food question reminded me that friendship and understanding often start with genuine conversation.

Learning Mandarin helped me realize that cultures can be both different and similar at the same time. We may speak different languages and come from different backgrounds, but we share many of the same hopes, values, and dreams.

That is why I believe language is about more than just communication. For me, Mandarin has never been merely a language. It has been a bridge connecting people, cultures, and two ancient civilizations with so much to learn from one another.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

For this reason, I am deeply grateful to the Chinese Bridge Competition for providing such a meaningful platform. It challenged me to sharpen my language skills, broadened my perspective on China, and helped me connect with people who share the same passion for language and culture.

I am equally thankful to the India China Academy, and to all the teachers who guided and encouraged me throughout this journey. Their patience, support, and belief in me have played an important role in every achievement I have made so far.

I am also deeply grateful to my parents. There were times when people wondered why I spent so much time learning Chinese, and some even questioned whether it was worth the effort. During those moments, my parents never doubted me. They believed in my passion long before any achievements, awards, or results could prove it right.

Today, as I think back to the student who could barely read *pinyin*, I feel thankful. I'm thankful for every lesson, every challenge, every friendship, and every opportunity.

Winning the India Finals of the Chinese Bridge Competition is one of the most memorable moments of my life, but I do not see it as the end of my journey.

Sometimes I imagine meeting the younger version of myself — the girl who would never have dreamed of speaking Mandarin on stage one day.

She would probably be surprised, then smile, and feel proud — proud of every late night, every challenge, every friendship, and every step that led here.

Yet this is only the beginning. My next destination is China, and I look forward to continuing this journey with curiosity, determination, and an open heart.

The author is a student at Sanatan Dharma Adarsh Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Una, Himachal Pradesh, and a Mandarin learner at the India China Academy. She was crowned champion of the 2026 Chinese Bridge Competition India Finals for college students and will represent India at the Global Finals in China.

Living Landscapes in Wenzhou

By Devinder Kumar

The expo presents a vision of what the future could look like if cities are shaped with care, respect, and imagination.

In the gentle warmth of spring, as blossoms unfolded and nature returned to life, the vibrant city of Wenzhou in eastern China's Zhejiang Province opened its doors to the world with the 15th China (Wenzhou) International Garden Expo. This grand event is more than a display of horticultural excellence — it reflects how different civilizations understand nature, culture, and sustainable living. The expo has brought landscapes from around the world together in a shared space, offering visitors an opportunity to experience the diversity of global garden traditions in one stop.

A CITY OF GLOBAL GARDENS

Located near Wenzhou South Railway Station, the main venue of the expo demonstrates a seamless integration of natural surroundings with human design. Embraced by mountains and water, the area creates a setting that feels both expansive and intimate. Unlike some exhibitions that impose themselves on the landscape, this expo appears to grow organically from its environment. This approach reflects a philosophy that positions human-nature harmony at the center of

development.

According to Xu Jing, deputy general manager of Wenzhou Urban Development Group, hosting the expo is a milestone for Wenzhou and testifies to the city's commitment to innovation, sustainability, and openness. The fact that this massive project was conceptualized and completed within just two years speaks volumes about what locals describe as Wenzhou speed: a blend of efficiency, planning, and relentless dedication.

Navigating the expo feels like embarking on a journey across continents. The international gardens offer a fascinating glimpse into how different cultures interpret the relationship between humanity and nature. Each garden presents not only a visual design but also a cultural narrative expressed through plants, structures, and spatial arrangements. The Italian Garden, for instance, features an elegant terraced layout and Roman-style columns that evoke the grandeur of classical European architecture. Designed by a renowned Italian landscape architect, the garden skillfully blends Italy's traditional expertise in layered landscapes with modern architectural elements. Unsurprisingly, it has become a favorite among visitors, serving as a picturesque backdrop for photographs and quiet reflection.

Further along, the Netherlands Garden offers a completely different yet equally compelling experience. Dominated by its iconic windmill, it reflects the country's mastery of water and land, symbolizing centuries of innovation in natural resource management. Nearby, the Thailand Garden captures the richness of Southeast Asian culture through its intricate architectural details and vibrant aesthetics. The Canada Garden embraces openness and simplicity, inspired by its vast natural landscapes and environmental awareness. Each garden carries a distinct identity, yet together they form a collective narrative of global diversity and shared values.

THE UNDERLYING THEME OF THE MARITIME SILK ROAD

Binding many of these international gardens together is the underlying theme of the Maritime Silk Road — a historical network that once connected distant civilizations through trade and cultural exchange. This idea has been thoughtfully woven into the design of the expo. As Yu Wei, chief engineer at the Zhejiang Urban and Rural Planning Design Institute, explained, one notable aspect of this expo is its emphasis on the historical role of plants, particularly in the spice trade that flourished along the Maritime Silk Road.

In the Maritime Silk Road Cooperation Garden, plant species from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Europe are displayed, each representing a chapter of this shared history. The setting offers an informative and immersive experience, showing how plants can carry stories of exploration, trade, and cultural exchange.

Alongside the international section, the Chinese gardens celebrate regional diversity and cultural traditions that have evolved over centuries. The Zhejiang Garden, with its gentle water features and delicate bridges, brings the poetic elegance of the landscapes south of the mighty Yangtze River. The Beijing Garden reflects a more formal and grand aesthetic, drawing inspiration from classical Chinese architecture. The Chongqing Garden captures the dramatic beauty of mountainous terrain, using elevation and layered design to recreate the region's unique geography, while the Xiamen Garden, inspired by Gulangyu Island, uses color and materials to convey coastal character.

SUSTAINABILITY AND A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

What truly sets this expo apart, however, is its unwavering commitment to sustainability. The expo presents a model for how large-scale projects can coexist with nature rather than disrupting it. The surrounding areas have been preserved as natural features and integrated into the overall design. The lake



An opposite-side rooftop view of the Netherlands Garden. (Photo courtesy of the author)

within the site is part of an existing water system, enhanced through thoughtful landscaping to improve both its aesthetic and ecological value.

Perhaps most striking is the presence of ancient banyan trees, some over 800 years old. These trees have been carefully protected and incorporated into the design. As Yu Wei put it, the guiding principle was "ecology comes first, then the garden," reflecting a broader emphasis on harmony between humanity and nature.

Technology also supports these goals. Recycled construction materials, solar photovoltaic roof tiles, and resource reuse measures have been widely applied. Even mud dredged from water bodies has been repurposed into paving stones. Smart lighting systems and the use of robotics in construction highlight the role of technology in sustainable urban development.

Unlike many large-scale events that struggle to find relevance after they conclude, the expo has been planned with long-term use in mind. Xu Jing emphasized that plans for post-expo operations had been integrated into the project from the very beginning. Many of the exhibition spaces will be transformed into cultural and commercial facilities, including cafés, exhibition venues, and educational spaces. The aim is to create a vibrant, living space that continues to serve the community long after the expo has ended, ensuring that no infrastructure goes to waste.

ECHOES OF INDIA

From an Indian perspective, the expo also fosters a sense of familiarity. Despite the geographical distance and cultural differences, Chinese and Indian garden traditions share common ideas. Both view gardens as spaces of harmony and reflection — places where nature is not merely observed but experienced on a deeper level. In India, gardens such as Shalimar Bagh are designed with water channels, symmetry, and structured layouts to symbolize order and balance. Chinese gardens, though often more fluid in design, pursue similar principles of integration and balance. In both traditions, water, plants, and architecture are closely interconnected, reflecting a shared understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature.

As the day draws to a close and the golden light of dusk gently washes over the gardens, the expo invites quiet reflection. It presents a vision of what the future could look like if cities are shaped with care, respect, and imagination. It demonstrates that development and sustainability can complement each other when they are guided by planning and a true appreciation for nature.

However, more powerful than any visual impression is the sense of connection between cultures. Moving through the gardens, a shared relationship with nature that transcends borders becomes evident. This may be the loudest message of the expo: We can find unity in diversity, for we all share the natural world.

The author is a staff reporter with *China-India Dialogue*.


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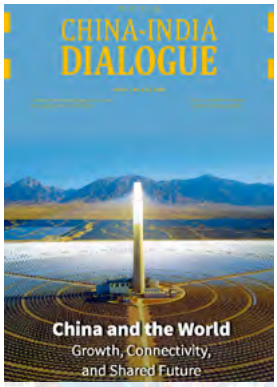

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