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**Rup Narayan Das\***

***Media and India-China Relations:  
Critiquing the Contents and the Intentions***

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Media is a double edged sword. To an extent, it can make or mar relationships between two countries, particularly if the two share the shibboleth of historical animus and have exhibited a definitive trust deficit in the past. It would be naïve to expect a news report, an editorial piece or an op-ed article to read like a press hand out or a banquet speech interspersed with bonhomie and pious platitude, but an adverse or a critical report or a comment in the media on the sensitive and complex Indo-China relations has all the potential to harden people's perception, which in turn can tell up further on the relationship between the two countries. Media can also dispel many a common myths and negative perceptions and be the ultimate catalyst to promote better understanding and cooperation.

It, therefore, requires a degree of circumspection. How effective is the media, particularly the electronic one, can be gauged from the assertion of Marshall McLuhan who coined the aphorism 'medium is the message'.<sup>2</sup> Media has the potential to be the spoil sport, particularly in the context of the two countries in question, inheriting the baggage of a troubled past with the unsettled border dispute and nationalism being an emotive issue in both the countries. China has long accused the Indian media of playing a negative role when it comes to bilateral relations. The common complaint has been against the "hawkish" nature of the Indian media. In this context one of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) discussed during the bilateral talks was to involve the national media from both the sides in the border meetings that are held on the national days of the two countries. The aim is to portray the bonhomie between the two sides. The proposal has now been accepted.

This paper aims primarily at making an analysis of both the news captions and its contents of news magazines and news papers in India and China so as to determine its impact on people's perceptions. For this purpose, it attempts to analyse the contents of

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news reports, editorials and opinion pieces, primarily in English newspapers published both in India and China, with more focus on China. As far as India is concerned, it may be mentioned that as of now India has four correspondents in Beijing. The newspaper and news agencies that are represented in China are *The Hindu*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Times of India* and the *Press Trust of India*. As far as China is concerned, the study focuses on China's leading English newspaper *China Daily*, *Global Times*, *People's Daily* and *Xinhua*, and the official briefing by the spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, etc. Research journals published in both India and China are also to be studied to discern respective perceptions of the Indian and Chinese scholars. As far as electronic media is concerned, their contents will be difficult to collate and so are not taken into consideration.

### Chinese Perception of India

The Chinese perception include both the popular perception in the Chinese social media like the micro blogs and also the state controlled print media like the *China Daily*, the *Global Times*, and the *Shanghai Daily*, etc.

#### Social Media – Microblogs

So far as microblogs are concerned, Simon Shen's article "Exploring the Neglected Constraints of Chindia: Analysing the Online Chinese Perception of India and its Interaction with China's Indian Policy"<sup>3</sup> is one such article in English. The study identified eight discussion forums to analyse "any discrepancies between the on line perception and the official Indian policy as the sample groups from which to gather primary sources." The eight discussions forums were as under:

1. *Strong Nation Forum* (SNF) (*Qiangguo luntan*), set up in 1999 in response to Belgrade embassy bombing. It "is arguably the earliest and most famous meeting point of on line Chinese nationalists. It is run by the state owned *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*).
2. *Community of Iron and Blood* is a forum run by amateurish military fans which focuses on military affairs. It is also famous for nationalist expressions.
3. *Peace Forum* is run by the official China Internet Information Center.
4. *Resuscitation Forum* is run by the China Central Television.
5. *Tianya Community* is privately run from Hainan Island.
6. *Phoenix Net Forum* is run by the privately owned Satellite Television Company Limited.
7. *FOB Business Forum* is a popular platform for Chinese businessmen doing business overseas, including those who have to interact with Indians.
8. *Back China Network* is a forum run by overseas Chinese living in the US. Despite its host's geographical position, most of its users and readers are from mainland China rather than Hong Kong.

The research questions that the study sought to answer are broadly two. The first question is: What general opinions do internet users voice about India, the Indians and Beijing's Indian policy? Secondly, how can the apparent gap between these perceptions and the official rhetoric of Beijing be explained? And how might such perceptions influence Sino-Indian relations?

Then the study proposed six propositions to determine the research questions as under:

- (a) Indians are seen as racially inferior to the Chinese.
- (b) India is seen as economically backward to China.
- (c) India is seen as militarily inferior to China.
- (d) India is seen as a western ally helping encircle China.
- (e) India is seen subverting Chinese sovereignty.
- (f) Sino-Indian strategic partnership receives half-hearted support.

Prof. Simon Shen in his study took one year in time frame (01 November 2008 to 31 October 2009). While concluding the finding of the research, the author wrote that "although the ratio does not represent a holistic view of these forums, it can still be used to study their comparative rational levels. Most surprisingly, it is generally found that the forums normally visited by liberals, despite their relative rationality, do not show a great deviation of stance towards India from the radical nationalists, making the online Chinese perception of India more monolithic than that of the US or Japan. Using a rough calculation, messages expressing a positive feeling towards India accounted for at most one-tenth."

## **Decoding the Chinese Media**

### ***Life of Pi***

With regards to the perception of India in the Chinese media, it is worth a while to find out how Ang Lee's Hollywood blockbuster movie: "*Life of Pi*" has been perceived by the Chinese media, including in the social media. This, not only because the film has an Indian story line, but also because it has an Indian actor -- Suraj Sharma -- playing the main protagonist. Writing about the impact of the movie in China, the Beijing based correspondent of *The Hindu*, Ananth Krishnan wrote, "Ang Lee has appeared to have succeeded in doing what the Indian government has failed to achieve in over more than a decade of tourism campaigns and promotion drives in China: rekindling Chinese interest in travelling to India and in Indian culture." He wrote further, "Beyond the box office too, the film has sparked a wide debate -- and thousands of comments in the vibrant on line community, with several Chinese writers and micro bloggers seeing the film as a long-overdue introduction to Indian culture for the Chinese public often ignorant about India."<sup>4</sup>

Surfing the Chinese blogs, he mentions a few very positive comments. One blogger wrote, "A beautiful film; India is now the most beautiful travel destination in my heart".

Yet one more blogger Au Xin, a DJ at Radio Guangdong, said in a message to his 45,000 followers on Sina Weibo that what he liked about the film was director “Ang Lee’s respect of and belief in Indian culture.” Ms. Ruby, a Beijing-based microblogger, wrote that the film which also dwells on India’s religious and cultural traditions, would “correct the prejudice and ignorance about Indian culture (in China)”. Xu Xiaohuang, an executive at an insurance company in Zhejiang, said the film was “meaningful and beautiful, and makes me want to travel to India”. Another micro blogger, whom Krishnan mentions, said in a post on Weibo that he had taken his daughter to see the film. He wrote, “India’s Minister of Travel should award Lee with a medal. He presents the beauty of India to the world”.

In complete contrast to the selection of posts in the Chinese social media by Ananth Krishnan, the biases and prejudice of a selection of posts by the state controlled print media is also quite discernable. According to a review of the film in *China Daily*, “Ang Lee’s reputation is perhaps the foremost reason for the film’s popularity in China.”<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to accept that the success of the film in China is only because of Ang Lee. It seems from the comments culled out from social media by Ananth Krishnan that the Indian story line and the cast also have much to do with the success of the film in China and this has not been acknowledged in the review of the film in China’s state controlled media suggesting that the state controlled Chinese media is seldom favourably inclined towards India’s rich culture and only limits it to the linkage with Buddhism. The review of the film carried a photograph of Suraj Sharma with Ang Lee. According to the review, the film received 4 billion posts in Weibo, China’s fastest and most accessible platforms. It also mentions that “the film deals with many serious issues, such as faith and morality.” Nowhere in the review was there any mention of India. In one place, it was only mentioned, “Netizens also interpreted the carnivorous island. Some contend it represents the Hindu God Vishnu. Others argue it symbolises Pi’s mother. And many say it was just a fantastical landscape.” The film was also reviewed in *Global Times*, which carried the picture of Suraj Sharma squatting on the raft floating in the sea. Regarding the film the review mentions that Ang Lee “introduces the tender suspense between characters – boy and beast – as they struggle for placid coexistence”.<sup>6</sup>

It is evident from this comparative analysis that even though the social media in China is regulated, the state-controlled media does suffer from inherent prejudices and has reservations about putting India in any kind of a positive light.

### ***The Delhi Gang Rape***

The infamous Delhi gang rape of November 2012 that occupied considerable media space the world over also found its echo in the Chinese media, including the social media. Hu Xijin, the editor of the nationalistic party-run *Global Times* argued in a widely criticised message to his three million followers on Weibo that the case had shown the limitations of the rule of law in a democracy. “For a backward society, no law can help,” he said. “India calls itself the world’s biggest democratic state, but it is also one of the most disorderly. In the 1960s, China and India had the same level

of development, but now China's GDP is three times India's".<sup>7</sup> Another similar commentary message printed in the same news paper also reflected the same cynicism, describing India as "an inefficient and unequal democracy". "The Indian democratic system seemingly can't solve these problems but provides legitimacy for (rulers). India's democracy is now manipulated by a small number of elite and interest groups.... Efficient democracy means more than electoral politics". The Government-run *Beijing Youth Daily* in a Weibo message said, "The current problems in India are fundamentally the problems of Indian democracy, which is reflected by the weak regime and the invalid social management".

But, in the Chinese social media, the news also raised the issue of the vibrancy of freedom of the press in India. For example one internet user of north eastern Jilin responded that "at least India allows protest. If such a thing were to happen in China, would we have had a large scale protest?" Ananth Krishnan cites yet another comment in the Chinese social media wherein a blogger Feng Zetangin from Guangzhou referred to the rape of school students by local officials, but the government failed to do anything. Bruce Wang, another microblogger, wrote that "China Central Television intensively reported the rape case in India. But please don't turn a blind eye to our own country's sexual harassment of children." He further wrote that Kai-Fu Lee, former founding president of Google China, who has 24 million followers on Weibo and maintains a hugely popular blog wrote that "the system (in India) allows the people to take to the street and to expose the scar, so that the government has to face it squarely". If the scar is hid firmly", he added, cryptically, "it will instead fester and become inflamed, and by the time it is exposed, it would be too late to face it".

### ***Border Incursion***

The incidence of Chinese incursion into the Indian part of Line of Actual Control (LAC) on 15 April 2013 also found its resonance in Chinese social media. According to a report in the *Times of India*<sup>8</sup> by its Beijing correspondent Saibal Dasgupta, although tightly controlled, the Chinese internet space was filling up with hundreds of accusations that India was playing foul, by raking up a non-issue over an alleged fake infiltration by the country's army. He further wrote that many users of Weibo are demanding that their government "teach India a lesson". He quotes one Weibo user asking, "Indians fishing in troubled water working hand-in-glove with Japan." The report further said that there were signs of tacit official encouragement of such internet postings, which have been allowed by censors that usually block any campaign against what they regard as "friendly countries".

### **Chinese Perception of India in their Print-media**

How do the Chinese media, particularly print media look at India and Indians in general? It is true that it may be misleading or erroneous to draw any conclusion from any single article or even a bunch of articles, but several articles of the Chinese print media are certainly suggestive of the prejudice of the writers. Even more worrisome is

the impact it may have on the readers, either Indian or Chinese. Take for example the article written by Chen Chenchen, the opinion editor of *Global Times*<sup>9</sup>, who visited India few years ago. Let us read the first paragraph of the article, which is as under:

We were heading towards the home of a middle class family living in East End Apartments, Delhi. The taxi navigated through the night, and the surroundings appeared increasingly run-down. Looking out of the window, there were few cars and more rickshaws on the road.

Certainly, the number of cars in China is any time more than they are in India. But does the observation reflect a typical scene while approaching a Delhi colony? It reflects a prejudice rather than a discerning observation. In yet another place in the article the editor wrote:

The Indian family we were visiting included journalists, artists, engineers and architects. They all warmly invited their neighbours to meet and talk with us. It was a community of intellectuals, and the women all had decent jobs. Until the moment we stood up to say good-bye, we still couldn't believe that the material standards of these Indian middle class families fell so far below our expectations.

These kind of observations only corroborates the propositions and the findings of Simon Shen. He further writes, "Certainly, Indians are not necessarily satisfied with their life, but they do have a more peaceful and satisfied state of mind, which is in sharp contrast with the anxious, testy Chinese."

In yet another place in the same article, he writes: "Before going to India, I heard a story from a friend, saying that he had dinner at the house of a rich Indian businessman, whose servants kneeled besides the table reverently throughout the meal. The friend talked to a servant, asking his plan for the future, only to learn his appreciation of his employer and the gods." The story was probably exaggerated, but such attitudes do exist. "Compared with their Chinese counterparts, Indians better understand being content with their lot, and tend to have less appeals about their interests and rights. It is hard to tell whether the pros outweigh the cons in this regard. On the one hand this mentality helps placate the public and facilitate social stability." This excerpt certainly contains streaks of the author's disdain for Indian democracy.

The tendency of Chinese media to put down India in their newspapers and blogs is also evident in yet another rather disparaging remark. Commenting on Delhi's transport, he writes, "Take traffic as a simple example. In the streets of Delhi, vehicles of all sizes and shapes crowd together. People are everywhere, waiting for a bus ride or ride by motor cycle. They file into buses whose doors are never close, or sit on overloaded motorcycles. Cars are lined up in traffic jams, but endless drones from the horn are rarely heard." The inherent cynicism of the author is also revealed in yet another place, "But on the other hand, the Indian sense of reconciliation and relaxation may clash with or even impede development. Unlike the Chinese, surrounded by a sense of urgency or ambition, Indians seem less motivated to seize the moment, or catch up with more

successful examples, despite wide cleavages, crying out for equality and fairness, and fighting for a better tomorrow.”

### **China's Threat Perception of India**

India does not figure high on China's radar as far as China's threat perception is concerned. This is evident from China's Defence White Paper published from time to time. But India's democratic edifice and proximity to the West, particularly the US and other democratic powers such as Japan, South Korea, and even to some extent Australia, and now recently, countries of the South East Asia such as Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia as well have been of some concern to China. When India revised its defence doctrine in 2009 to meet the twin challenges of China and Pakistan, there were some comments in China. Hao Ding, a researcher of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences wrote an article 'Great Changes in India's Defence Strategy – War objective shifts to giving China importance, while treating Pakistan as lightweight' in the Party affiliated Chinese language organ *China Youth Daily* on 27 November 2009. In the article the author identified five discernible shifts in India's defence doctrine.<sup>10</sup>

In the first place, 'in terms of goals, India now aims at becoming a global military power in contrast to its earlier objective of acquiring a regional military status'. Hao Ding wrote that prior to the end of the Cold War, India followed an expansionist and hegemonic policy in South Asia by dismembering Pakistan, annexing Sikkim and dispatching troops to Sri Lanka and Maldives. The article further goes on to assert that in the twenty-first century, India's national interests are seemingly expanding and accordingly, it is striving to protect its strategic superiority in the South Asian sub-continent as well as in the Indian Ocean. Simultaneously, India is actively projecting its power into the Asia-Pacific regions instead of being only a South Asian power. It is thus making efforts to emerge as 'a major and positive geo-strategic player' in the Eurasian political chessboard.

Secondly, from the point of view of strategic guidelines, as a complete departure from the usual, India has shifted from the role of 'passive defence' to a line of 'active and aggressive defence'. Looking at this scenario from the angle of war objectives, India is now laying emphasis on giving China importance while treating Pakistan as lightweight, as compared to in the past, where equal emphasis was given to both China and Pakistan'.

Thirdly, in matters of strategic deployment, India has adopted a strategy of stabilising its western front and strengthening the northern front, simultaneously giving equal emphasis to land and sea warfare, in stark contrast to its earlier stress on land warfare'. To substantiate his point, the Chinese scholar further mentioned how India had already made plans to dispatch additional two mountain divisions at the Sino-Indian border and deploy Su-30 fighter aircraft as well as missiles there in order to fight a 'middle or small-scale partial border war under high tech conditions'.

## Chinese Reaction to India's Foray into South China Sea

Perhaps the best illustration of how media affected the relationship between the two countries can be discerned from how media in both India and China reacted and responded to India's foray into the South China Sea. It may be argued that the discord on the issue was to near hysterical proportion by a large section of media in China.

A new twist was given to India's 'Look East Policy' prior to the visit of India's then-External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna to Hanoi in September 2011, to participate in the 14<sup>th</sup> India-Vietnam Joint Commission Meeting, when it was declared that the two countries were to sign an agreement to explore oil in the South China Sea. The media in the two countries went over board to react and comment. New Delhi and Beijing, however, at the governmental level handled the issue deftly. On 15<sup>th</sup> September, alluding to the media report, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu said that China enjoys indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea, and that China's stand was based on historical facts and international law. It was further stated that China was opposed to any project in the South China Sea, without directly referring to India.<sup>11</sup>

The same day while answering a question raised by a correspondent as to the Chinese objection to the ONGC Videsh venture, the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India said in New Delhi that ONGC Videsh had been present in Vietnam for quite some time, including in a major oil venture for off-shore oil and natural gas exploration, and that they were in the process of further expanding their cooperation and operation in Vietnam.<sup>12</sup>

The issue was, however, played out in the media both in China and India. The ultra nationalist *Global Times* observed that 'reasoning may be used first, but if India is persistent in this, China should try every possible means to stop this cooperation from happening.'<sup>13</sup> An editorial in the same newspaper described the proposal of the ONGC Videsh as reflecting India's rising ambition, and a likely Indian move to counter China's behaviour in the Indian Ocean. Yet another report entitled, 'Bundling Strategy over South China Sea will be disillusioned' was carried by Xinhua News Agency on 27 September. The report said that India's oil exploration cooperation with Vietnam in South China Sea was a blunt trampling up on China's sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> In one more article titled "Time to teach those around South China Sea a lesson" carried in the *Global Times*, it was commented that 'we (Beijing) shouldn't waste the opportunity to leave some tiny scale battles that could deter provocations from going further.'<sup>15</sup> The commentary by the Indian strategic community, though nuanced, was hasty. The comment by Indian strategic analyst C. Raja Mohan was, however, mature and dignified. He wrote, "... Vietnam's new importance to India has been misrepresented by the media at home and abroad by viewing it through the distorting prism of China."<sup>16</sup>

The cooperation between ONGC Videsh and Petro-Vietnam goes back to 1980s, which led to the signing of the Production Sharing Contract between Hydrocarbon India Ltd., renamed later as ONGC Videsh, and Petro-Vietnam in Phu Kan basin in

Vietnam, through the regular bidding process. Later in June 2006, they signed the deal for the awarding of two exploration blocks 127 and 128. Some of the key areas in which both the companies are desirous of cooperating are related to a exchange of information on the petroleum industry, new investments, expansion and operations of oil and gas exploration and production including refining, transportation and supply in Vietnam, India and third countries, according to the laws and regulations of their respective countries.

The signing of the agreement with Hanoi by India further outraged Beijing, which impelled the official news agency Xinhua to announce that both China and Vietnam will not allow any third party hostile forces to destroy their relations. Both New Delhi and Beijing, however, did not allow the relationship between the two countries to drift further. The then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, in his meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wen Jiabao, on the sidelines of East Asia Summit meeting in Bali reiterated that the Indian exploration of oil and gas deposits in the South China Sea were purely commercial and the issue of sovereignty over South China Sea should be resolved according to the international law and practice. Beijing also reiterated its stated position that it hoped not to see any outside forces (obviously referring to India) involved in the South China Sea dispute. The two sides, however in spite of the spat, tried to strike a friendly note and Beijing even extended a charm offensive saying that “there is no power in the world that can prevent the development of bilateral relations between the two countries.” Beijing appeared to suggest that differences with India were driven by third parties and blamed the United States for sowing seeds of discord between China and its neighbours and thereby attempting to contain China.

The Chinese position on the issue, however, hardened later. In another article in April 2016, published immediately after the India-China-Russia trilateral meeting in Moscow on 18 April 2016, *Global Times* said, “For years, India had taken a prudent, yet ambiguous stance over the South China Sea issue. India expressed the same attitude as China and Russia, indicating a changing state of mind of India. Why is that the case?” In trying to find a plausible answer, it said, “One possible reason is that India has been striving for full-fledged membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). In July 2015, the SCO in Ufa summit launched the process of accession for India and Pakistan. But India’s inclusion into the SCO has not been completed. India needs to prove first that its accession can play a constructive role for the unity of the members of the SCO and the effect of the SCO, internationally. In addition, what rights India will or will not be entitled to, after it enters the SCO will be determined by the existing members. Against this backdrop, India taking a consistent stance with China and Russia in diplomatic matters will facilitate its accession to the SCO and help it play its role within this regional framework.”<sup>17</sup> This clearly suggests that the articles in the *Global Times* are commissioned to take a particular stance conveying a clear message to India and the public at large in both countries as well as to the world. Such articles are not written by writers to give their own views but are mouthpieces for the ruling regime in China.

## Chinese Reaction to Growing Indo-US Strategic Proximity

While India's foray into South China Sea dominated the Chinese media as far as the Sino-Indian relations are concerned, the related issue of the growing Indo-US strategic relationship has also attracted the attention of the Chinese media. For example in March 2012, an article with a disdainful title 'Nervous India contemplates shelter under extended wing of eager US' was carried.<sup>18</sup> The article was written by Liu Zongyi, a research fellow of the Centre for South Asia Studies at Shanghai Institute for International Studies. The article also carried an illustration with a large size eagle (USA) looking at a benign looking, and seemingly attentive small sized elephant (India). The article said, "With the US return to Asia and the growing economic gap between China and India, the Sino-Indian relationship is seeing subtle changes these days. Some Indian scholars trumpet an alliance under the US leadership to counterbalance China."

The article further wrote, "There are pessimists (in India), who are supportive of a China containment policy. According to one estimate by Wu Yongnian of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, 20 to 30 percent of the Indian diplomatic and strategic circles support Indians confronting China. But since Indian scholars know relatively little about China and are vulnerable to Western media keen on hyping China's threat, the number of those Western and domestic media keen on hyping China's threat, the number of those who support confrontation is growing." Commenting on the role of media in the US and India exacerbating the relationship between India and China, the article further said, "... so, at present, we see the ironic sight of articles in both the US and Indian media trying to provoke the other side into tensions with China. The Indian media highlights that Uncle Sam is well prepared to battle China, while the US media points out that India is engaging in military expansion in preparation for possible Sino-Indian boundary conflicts".

It is pertinent to mention that although the government controlled media in China has been critical of the US-India strategic partnership in their commentaries, they know that India follows a strategic autonomy in its foreign policy pursuits. In an article with a very carefully worded title 'Indo-US strategic distrusts stalls LSA signing' published in April 2016, the *Global Times* commented, "...such concerns come from the deficit of a strategic trust between India and the US. Regardless of the differences in national policies, Indian strategic elites have always had a constant sense that US is not a trustworthy partner and this time is no exception."<sup>19</sup> In trying to convey a message to both India and the US the article further said, "In the first place, the Indians felt offended by the announcement of an American sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan before Carter's visit. There is no sign of bilateral talks on the issue yet but ties with its over arching rivals are obviously resented by the Indians." It is an irony that while China has empathy with India regarding US supplying F-16 fighter to Pakistan, it has no such qualms about arming Pakistan. In an attempt to create misunderstanding between India and the US, the article further said, "the Indian media stayed cool about the agreement and Carter's visit as well. India's disappointment comes in particular from the fact that the

US declined its request on acquiring catapult launch technology, which is critical for India's indigenous carrier manufacturing, one of the major backbones of Prime Minister Modi's plan on modernising the Indian navy." The article concluded with a remark to the proposal regarding joint patrols in the South China Sea. It said, "Evidently enough, it needs to feel its way forward and try not to agitate China by crossing the bottom line and consequently it declined to discuss the prospect of joint patrols in the South China Sea, despite the obvious interest and much enthusiasm from the American counterpart."

Scoffing at India's democratic edifice seems to be yet another recurring feature of China's party-controlled media. For example, when IMF reported in 2015 that India's GDP would surpass that of China in 2016, it invited snide remarks by the *Global Times*. Peeved over IMF's forecast, an editorial in the *Global Times* in January 2015 made the disparaging remark "having been long overshadowed by China, it is keen to become the best in some aspects." It further said, "even if the Indian economy does outstrip China's one day, the impact on the Chinese public will be far less than on its own people, since India has been waiting for this outcome since long. Some Western media attach much more significance to India's overtaking China than the Chinese people themselves do."<sup>20</sup>

An article carried in the same newspaper in April the same year was also critical of the claims of the IMF. The article said that, "while the Chinese economy is slowing down after entering the new normal, India under Narendra Modi's government has witnessed a rapid economic growth in recent years. Speculations that Indian economy will surpass that of China and India will become a new engine for the world economy are frequently heard in international public opinions. Some even conjecture that the Chinese model is inferior to that of India." The article further remarked, "Hyping the Indian economy's superiority, Indian officials and the Western media are instigating international investors to direct their capital from Beijing to New Delhi, giving impetus to Indian economic growth. However, such hype has limited effects as profit-oriented investors try to lower their transaction costs as well. The Indian market, be it in scale, profit margin or business environment, cannot compete with that of China. Arguing the differences between Chinese and Indian models, Western scholars are attempting to take advantage of ideology to deny the efficiency of Chinese political and economic institutions."<sup>21</sup>

The response of the Chinese media towards Prime Minister Modi has been very measured and structured. As it is finding it increasingly difficult to ignore the positive achievements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the article made a studied and guarded remark that "since he came to office, Modi has boosted the morale of the Indian economy. However, Modi's economic reforms have achieved little progress, which is known in the international community. The falling of oil price will still provide India with years of opportunities to develop its economy...." Then in a conciliatory tone it said, "If New Delhi can seize the opportunity to promote major reforms, its long-term economic development will have a solid foundation." Yet in another article the *Global Times* wrote, "The recent twists and turns in the Sino-Indian relations have presented a

somewhat puzzling picture to the world. Bilateral relations seem to oscillate back and forth drastically between outright confrontations and a united front. Clearly, with the partisan dynamics of domestic agendas as well as the political confidence reaped from various international scenarios, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under Narendra Modi's leadership has taken new initiatives in India's relations with the major powers."<sup>22</sup>

India's infrastructural development along the India-China border and its beefing up of defence preparedness has also aroused critical comments by the Chinese media. These responses are again measured and calibrated. An article in *Global Times* published in July 2016 carried a loaded title "Deployment of tanks on India-China border hinders potential for Chinese investment." "The article begun with an allusion to increasing Chinese investments in India and then immediately made a critical remark, "it is puzzling that while deploying tanks near China's border, India still strives to woo Chinese investments." The article further said, "the deploying of tanks near the Indo-China border may hit a nerve within the Chinese business community, causing investors to weigh the threat of political instability when they make investment decisions."<sup>23</sup>

### **Indian Perception of Sino-Indian Relations**

One of the defining features of the perception of the Indian media, both print and electronic with regard to China has been both trust deficit and a security dilemma. The suggestive title of the opinion pieces articles, editorials, news captions and analysis of their contents attest to this. A major chunk of contents pertains to Sino-Pak nexus, China's infrastructural development in the Pakistan occupied Kashmir, border transgressions, China's foray into Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, etc. China's penetration into India's telecom sector and its possible security implications has also occupied some space in the Indian media. Considering the sensitive nature of relationship between the two countries and the tendency of the media to high light the negativity, in a public lecture the then National security Adviser of India Mr. Shivshankar Menon exhorted the media and political commentators to "learn the virtues of moderation". Menon said that the Chinese could not believe that Indian media and commentators did not speak authoritatively for the country, as their controlled media and academia did. "We must recognise that other countries could have similar imperatives as ours too and their own reasons for what they do. And why create self-fulfilling prophesies of conflict with powerful neighbours like China", Menon said while delivering the 16<sup>th</sup> Prem Bhatia Memorial Lecture.<sup>24</sup> Earlier at the meeting of the National Security Council Advisory Board in September 2009, a senior member argued for strong measures to control the media – especially the 24-hour news channel.<sup>25</sup> He was alluding to media reports about Chinese transgressions along the India-China border.

### **Conclusion**

A scrutiny of the news reports, blog postings, opinion pieces, and editorials in the Chinese media including the contents of the electronic media clearly suggest the trust

deficit between the two countries and the tendency to debunk India's democratic edifice. Media in China including the social media are intelligently calibrated. There is a lack of awareness among the Chinese people about India. The understanding is still limited to Buddhism to a large extent.

As far as India is concerned, besides the trust deficit persistent security dilemma are the continuing features of the contents of Indian media. The electronic media in particular hypes the security threat. The Indian correspondence based in Beijing, however are doing a great service in their objective and at times courageous reporting. They report on diverse issues and concerns relating to Chinese polity, economy, society, culture, security and foreign policy. As a result now in India we have a much better understanding about not only Sino-Indian relations, but also China as a whole.

It would be difficult to expect Beijing to Change its policy beyond rhetoric. The think-tanks in both the countries should cooperate and collaborate for better understanding through joint research and publications. There is some goodwill, which needs to be harnessed. The Indian Embassy and the Ministry of China should be more proactive. There should be an exchange of Indian movies as well as cultural programmes. The Indian embassy website for the Chinese people should be more proactive and thoughtful.

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