

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### Sino-Indian relations inch sideways

*Rajiv Gandhi is committed to intensifying India's relations with China—cautiously.*

In spite of a heavy press buildup and demonstrable interest here in seeing a substantive improvement in relations—an interest buoyed by Prime Minister Gandhi's one-hour meeting with Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang in New York—the Sixth Round of official talks between India and China concluded the week of Nov. 11 with no breakthrough on the pivotal border issue.

On the contrary, in placing a patently unacceptable proposition on the table, China appears to be broadcasting that it is in no hurry to settle, but simply wants to use the issue to test and probe the Indian leadership over the long term.

This Sixth Round—the first to move from procedural issues into the substance of the border and other matters—was led by Mr. A. P. Venkateswaran, secretary in the Indian foreign ministry in charge of China, and Liu Shuqing, vice-minister of foreign affairs of China. The talks were organized into four subgroups that undertook parallel discussions on the border problem, science and technology, cultural exchanges, and property and assets, respectively.

Settlement was reached on a dispute over Indian embassy properties in Peking that had been seized during the Cultural Revolution, and this will result in the re-establishment and expansion of the Indian embassy complex there.

Similarly, the subgroups on science and technology, and cultural exchanges, took decisions to exchange delegations in the computer industry,

agricultural education, plasma physics, and laser and bio-technology. It was also decided that a joint seminar would be held in Peking on socio-economic planning in India and China.

There is no doubt that contacts and interchanges at many levels between India and China are increasing dramatically. But India's insight into the wiles and ways of its inscrutable neighbor to the east was acquired painfully during the late 1950s and 1960s. And today, genuine interest in improved and expanded relations, a process begun by Indira Gandhi in 1981, is guided by the requisite caution and clear-headedness.

Thus it was no great surprise to Indian officials that when they got round to the border issue, they were treated to a game of hard-ball. Liu Shuqing and his deputy for the border talks, Yang Zhengya, head of the Chinese foreign ministry's Asia Department, unfolded the proposition that either India agree to a package settlement based on "existing realities" in all the sectors—a reference to Chinese occupation of the strategic Aksai Chin area of Ladakh—or be prepared to cede territory in the "eastern sector" of India in exchange for any occupied area China might agree to return in Ladakh.

The Chinese representatives did not spell out their exact demand in the eastern sector. They did reiterate their formal position that 80,000 square kilometers of Chinese territory was under India's illegal occupation, and that the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh had been set up on this terri-

tory with no legal justification. They acknowledged further that India's concessions in this sector would allow China to establish a presence on the southern face of the Himalayas, clearly an intolerable strategic prospect for India.

Nor did China give any acknowledgement to Sikkim's accession to India, though this was not broached directly.

Significantly, China premised its 1962 invasion of India on the same refusal to recognize the McMahon line in India's Northeast, on the pretext that it was an arbitrary imposition of foreign British colonialism. Their reassertion of these claims made it clear that there would be no settlement of the border issue at anything less than the highest political level.

At the close of the talks, the Indian government spokesman said that both sides had "achieved a clearer understanding of each other's position," and had laid the basis for some agreed principles to solve the boundary question. As the eastern sector was discussed in depth in this round, the central and western sectors are on the agenda for the next round in Peking.

China's broader strategy remains open to question. Chinese-Soviet talks, while ongoing, remain inconclusive. During the Indo-Chinese talks, it was announced in Islamabad that Pakistan and China will open the strategic Khunjerab Pass on the Karakoram Highway to the public. The jointly constructed road symbolizes the strategic relationship China has nurtured with India's self-proclaimed adversary to its west. While Indian government officials have been careful to refrain from making any charges, allegations raised in the U.S. Congress that China has fostered Pakistan's atom bomb project have circulated widely here.