

India-China Relations

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

We spend tremendous amount of our time in groups. This is so, since formation of groups is natural to humans, groups are everywhere. The group could be formal or informal in nature. Presently, we are concerned with formal group interactions only. One person alone does not have all the talent, skill or ideas to accomplish a complex task. But by working together, individuals in a group can achieve far more than individuals working alone. The interactive process of discussing a subject is frequently used by corporates and governments to seek more information and resolve issues of multiple complexities. Moreover, the ability to work effectively as a member of a team is clearly visible when a person participates in a group discussion. To take part in a group discussion, the participant should have adequate skills and possess necessary information on the subject being discussed. Due to this very reason, group discussion is now being also utilised to assess abilities of a participant to work and lead a group activity. It goes without saying that abilities of leading a group are essentially needed by Corporate Managers and Administrators. Currently, group discussion has become a part of selection process to select candidates for admissions to a number of well-known management institutes, and also select candidates for entry-level jobs.

Ten candidates were called for a GD session during the process of selection for admission to a prestigious management institute. The candidates arrived at the venue dressed in formal clothes. They wore formal shirts, pants and ties and formal shoes. They were allotted Identification Numbers, which were pinned on their shirts in such a way that these numbers were easily visible from a distance. Thereafter, candidates were made to sit in a semi-circle to facilitate the three assessors clearly hear them, as well as observe their body language. All the dos and don'ts during the process of conduct of this GD were explained to them. They were told to maintain discipline, which implied that only one person should speak at a time. They were at liberty to speak as much as they wanted and as many times as they wished, but at the same time, they must ensure that all candidates were given an opportunity to express their views. Anyone could start and summarise the group discussion and assessors would not



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guide the process of this GD. They could take 25-30 minutes to conclude this GD. Subsequently, they were given 5 minutes to collect their thoughts and jot down some points on a sheet of paper provided to them to recall. Three topics were then given to them and they were asked to choose any one after mutual agreement. The above topic was chosen by this group of candidates for a group discussion. Thereafter, the group discussion proceeded in the following manner :

Candidate No. 2 : Good morning friends. I hope all of you are keen to express your views on this currently much discussed topic. To my mind, the most difficult problem that India faces today is : How to tackle a dominating China? Perhaps, India-China relations are presently at their lowest ebb after India and China were engaged in a military stand-off at multiple locations along the Sino-Indian border. On June 16, 2020, a violent clash took place between troops of the two countries in Galwan Valley, in which 20 Indian soldiers were also killed. Subsequent to this incident, tensions between the two countries have been running high. I think, we are required to discuss various developments which have been responsible in shaping India-China relations during past several years and what are the possibilities of improving this relationship between these two Asian giants in the near future. We need to

cover several aspects of India-China relations, which include economy, military, culture, trade and commerce, etc. Friends, you now start giving your views on this topic.

Candidate No. 7 : I think we should handle this topic in three parts : Firstly, India-China relations before independence; Secondly, after independence and thirdly, after the year 2000. Do you all agree?

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, I also think that it is a good idea to give this discussion some direction. Of course, we may talk very briefly about historical aspects and discuss in detail about India-China relations in modern times to keep our interest.

Candidate No. 9 : Friends, for thousands of years of recorded history, India and China have maintained peaceful relations, but the harmony of their relationship has diluted so much in modern times. In very early years, cultural exchanges between the two nations were common and before the transmission of Buddhism, both countries had established contacts in literature. Even in *Mahabharata*, there are references of China. There are records of contact between India and China during 2nd Century BCE and Buddhism was transmitted from India to China even in the 1st century CE and there were also trade links via Silk Road between the two nations. Later, many Indian scholars and monks travelled to China and the Cholas had strong links with China as well. The Mughals also attempted to reach Chinese market.

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, Tipu Sultan of Mysore had links with China and subsequently Indian goods including silk were exported to China. Later, Chinese leaders spoke and wrote against harsh British exploitation of India. Rabindranath Tagore was invited by China to speak on world peace. Jawaharlal Nehru was invited by Chinese government as an honoured guest in 1939 and China did support Indian freedom movement, while they had reservations about non-violent means adopted by Indians. Friends, I think, these many details should suffice to cover pre-independence period of India-China relations.

Candidate No. 3 : Yes, Nos. 9 and 6 have covered the pre-independence period of India-China ties fairly well.

Candidate No. 7 : Let us talk about the post-independence period of India-China relations.

Candidate No. 2 : After India gained independence in 1947, India did establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (ROC) which was the official designation of the country between 1912 and 1949. Later, India also established diplomatic relations with People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950 as the country was named after the end of civil war there. India was the first non-communist/socialist nation in Asia to do so. During the subsequent years, India had very good relations with China when Jawaharlal Nehru was India's PM and Zhou Enlai was the Chinese Premier. Both these leaders propagated the principles of *Panchsheel* (Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence). However, China did not adhere to these principles when the two countries had a conflict of interest in Tibet. While China asserted its claim on Tibet, India's concern over Tibet was taken as interference in internal affairs by the PRC. However, later India did recognise Tibet as a part of China and the existing trade arrangements between the two countries continued.

Candidate No. 6 : I think the catchphrase in 1950s was "Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai" and India encouraged more dialogue between the two countries on culture and literature. However, two major territorial disputes existed between India and China, which remained hidden until 1959. In the Northeast, Indian territory included the Assam Himalayan region up to the McMahon Line, which China did not recognise as a legal boundary and in the western sector, Indian territory inherited from British Raj included the Aksai Chin plateau, which Chinese maps started showing as Chinese territory. When India discovered that China built a road through the region, border clashes and Indian protests commenced. In 1959, China clearly declared that it did not recognise McMahon Line as the legal boundary between the two nations.

Candidate No. 1 : So, it appears that the good period of India-China relations was getting over. Am I right?

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, in 1959 only, the Indian Government allowed Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet to stay in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, where he established the Tibetan Government-in-exile. China accused India of expansionism and imperialism in Tibet and demanded rectification of the entire border situation. This led to a war between China and India in October 1962 which continued till November 1962, when China declared unilateral ceasefire. During this war, Indian troops were pushed back 48 km in Assam plains and China also occupied strategic points in Aksai Chin and Demchok regions in Ladakh. This was certainly a very low

point in the history of India-China relations.

Candidate No. 8 : I think No. 9 has covered this part of this relationship quite adequately.

Candidate No. 2 : From this period onwards in 1960s and early 1970s, relations between India and China declined, while relations between China and Pakistan improved considerably. During the India-Pakistan war in 1965, China fully backed Pakistan and even threatened India. Subsequently, in late 1967, two more conflicts occurred between Indian and Chinese forces at their contested border in Sikkim, known as Nathu La and Cho La clashes. This time also both sides suffered huge losses, but Indian forces were in a better position.

Candidate No. 6 : In the later years, China continued propaganda against India and supported dissident tribal groups in north eastern India. Once again in 1971, China sided with Pakistan during India-Pakistan war. In the UN, China described India as a "tool of Soviet expansionism". After 1977, both India and China renewed efforts to improve relations and later both countries officially re-established diplomatic relations in 1979. In 1980, India upgraded the deployment of forces around the Line of Actual Control and undertook infrastructural development in some disputed areas. In the later years, China again resorted to occupation of some territory and India did resist Chinese forward movements. However, subsequently Indian PM Indira Gandhi travelled to China to negotiate mutual de-escalation, which was followed by several rounds of border negotiations between 1981 and 1987.

Candidate No. 3 : I think all these developments indicate that India-China relations remained tense during this period.

Candidate No. 9 : China alleged that India was nibbling Chinese territory, but both sides backed away from a conflict. Later in 1988, after Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China, the two sides stressed the need to restore friendly relations on the basis of *Panchsheel*. Both countries also signed bilateral agreements for cooperation in several fields like science and technology, economic and scientific co-operation and cultural exchanges, etc. Later, in 1991 and 1992, after Chinese Premier Li Peng's visit to India and Indian President R. Venkataraman's visit to China, tensions between the two countries reduced and regular meetings between local military commanders were held. Consulates also reopened in Mumbai and Shanghai in December 1992. Chinese military delegation made a goodwill visit to India to initiate confidence-building measures and things appeared to be improving.

Candidate No. 5 : While relations between the two countries improved, China started providing increased military support to Myanmar, which did cause some unease in India.

Candidate No. 10 : So, you mean to imply that all was not going on well again. Is that so?

Candidate No. 2 : No, not exactly that. Sometime during this period, China not only favoured a negotiated solution on Kashmir, but also opposed any form of independence for the region. In 1995, serious efforts were made to redefine the McMahon Line and the Line of Actual Control, and briefly, tensions between the two countries did reduce. However, in 1998 India conducted nuclear tests and Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes declared that in his perception, China was India's enemy No. 1 and India needed nuclear weapons in defence against China's nuclear arsenal. Later in 1998, China became one of India's strongest international critics for conducting nuclear tests and also opposed India's entry into the nuclear club.

Candidate No. 7 : Yes, it may be recalled that in 1999, during Kargil conflict also, China supported Pakistan, but counselled Pakistan to withdraw forces as well.

Candidate No. 5 : Friends, I think this much discussion on India-China relations for the period up to the year 2000 should be considered adequate. Do you agree?

Candidate No. 4 : Yes, quite right. Can some friend now cover the state of India-China relations after the year 2000?

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, I recall in 2003, China officially recognised Indian sovereignty over Sikkim, as both countries moved forward to improve their relations. During this period, China supported India gaining a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, but later returned to a neutral position. In 2006, Nathu La pass was re-opened after a gap of 44 years for trading between the two countries. But shortly thereafter, India asserted that China was occupying 38,000 square kilometres of its territory in Kashmir, while China claimed that the whole Arunachal Pradesh belonged to China. China also asserted that people staying in Arunachal Pradesh did not need a visa to visit China, as Arunachal Pradesh was a part of China only. Later, in 2008 Indian PM Dr. Manmohan Singh visited China to discuss commerce, trade, defence and other issues.

Candidate No. 9 : In 2009, India joined the BRICS group of nations, which is group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Things seemed to be getting better, as Chinese Premier Mr. Wen Jiabao visited India in 2010 accompanied by 400 Chinese business leaders to improve business relations with India. Subsequently, two nations agreed to restore defence

cooperation also. Later, during BRICS Summit in New Delhi in 2012, Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao promised to develop India-China friendship and seek common development of the two nations and also discussed border dispute with India. Later in 2013, Chinese Premier Mr. Li Keqiang also visited India. However, later that year, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee visited Arunachal Pradesh and emphasised that the state was an integral part of India, which angered China a great deal.

Candidate No. 2 : Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping visited Delhi in 2014, but soon India's relations with China suffered a serious setback when Chinese army entered several kilometres inside the Line of Actual Control in Chumar sector in south-eastern Ladakh. Differences between the two countries again surfaced when China started building trade routes, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, through Pakistan occupied Kashmir territory. Subsequently in 2017 again, Doklam standoff took place, when China started constructing a road in a territory, which was claimed by China as well as India's ally Bhutan. India accused China of changing the status quo of the tri-junction point between India-China and Bhutan, which posed a threat to India's security. Later both countries agreed to disengage from the Doklam standoff.

Candidate No. 3 : I think No. 2 has covered this important development quite well.

Candidate No. 1 : Yes, I quite agree.

Candidate No. 6 : I think, in 2019, India reiterated that it would not join China's Belt and Road Initiative as this project ignores concerns about India's territorial integrity. Subsequently, Indian PM Mr. Narendra Modi and Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping have met several times between 2014 and 2019. In June 2020, 20 Indian soldiers and a number of Chinese soldiers were killed in Galwan Valley clashes between Indian and Chinese troops. China has now reinforced troops near Indian border with Tibet, and China has now adopted a very dominating attitude. Since then, diplomatic relations between the two countries have been worsening and recently India did impose some trade restrictions on Chinese goods being sold in India.

Candidate No. 9 : Not only that, Chinese influence, both economic and military, is being felt by India as well as all her neighbours, which include Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives, etc. Besides, China has now adopted an imposing posture in the Indo-Pacific. As China commands much bigger economic and military strength than India, New Delhi is now taking active part in the activities of the QUAD group of nations, which has the US, Japan, Australia and India as members. QUAD is basically a strategic grouping to reduce

Chinese domination, especially in the Indo-Pacific.

Candidate No. 4 : I think India has taken the right action by getting actively involved in QUAD group of nations to counter China.

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, I agree. But I think, before we conclude this discussion, we must mention about economic relations between the two nations, which is a very significant aspect of India-China ties.

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, quite right. I would like to highlight that by 2007, China had excelled at cost-effective manufacturing of all kinds of goods and due to world-wide trade and business activities, has now become one of the largest economic powers of the world. India-China economic relations have been institutionalised for a long time now. While some Indian companies have done well in China, a number of Chinese companies have done exceedingly well in India. Besides frequent border disputes, bilateral trade has flourished between the two nations and even currently, China is India's one of the largest trading partners. While cotton, gems, precious metals, copper, chemicals, salt, cement, machines etc. are being exported from India, major commodities exported from China to India include : electronic equipment, machines, engines, organic chemicals, technical equipment, ships, plastics, fertilisers, etc. However, it has been recently reported that after the Galwan Valley clashes, demand for Chinese goods in India has reduced.

Candidate No. 10 : Friends, the time allotted to us for this GD has already got over and we need to conclude it now. If you agree, may I request No. 6 to summarise this discussion.

Candidate No. 8 : Yes, that would be fine. No. 6, please conclude it now.

Candidate No. 6 : Well friends, we all had an extremely informative and fruitful discussion on this currently hot topic. India and China are the most populous and amongst the fastest developing economies of the world. Both countries have a long history of mutual business and trade. Even presently, China is one of the biggest trading partners of India. But, India faces a trade imbalance heavily in favour of China. While both countries have sought economic cooperation with each other, they also had frequent border disputes. These disputes emerged on regular intervals i.e., mainly in 1962, 1967, 2017 and then again in 2020. Presently, China has the world's largest active military force, and economic as well as military strength of China has increased manifold in the past few years. At the same time, China has also become very dominating and has border disputes with a number of countries. India is apprehensive about China's strong strategic relationship with Pakistan,

support to separatist groups in Northeast India and her domineering posture in South China Sea. The border dispute between India and China, which was passed on to both nations by the British, remains unresolved. I will conclude by saying that to reach a settlement with China, both countries must hold honest and comprehensive discussions about the history of the boundary dispute and somehow reach a compromise. This is suggested despite the fact that in the recently concluded 20th Party Congress, Mr. Xi has again emerged as the most powerful leader of China and has asserted that he would modernise his country's People's Liberation Army, shape China's security posture and win local wars, which have implications for India. Friends, all said and done, to live in peace is in the interest of both India and China.

Thank you friends. Have a good day.

Critical Assessment Of Candidates' Performance

Good : 2, 6 and 9

To effectively participate in a competitive Group Discussion, one needs focussed preparation and updating of information. The way these three candidates have spoken, clearly shows that they have done their home-work rather well. They were in a position to quote data and latest information on the topic to support their arguments, and facts put forward by them were not disputed by other candidates. These three candidates remained the main speakers throughout the entire GD session. Due to their adequate preparation, they also spoke with required self-confidence, which was positively noted by the three assessors. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Good'.

Average : 3, 5 and 7

These three candidates did help in deciding the format of the GD and also assisted in giving directions to the progression of the Group Discussion from time to time. However, it could be easily noted that their own contribution remained quite limited. It clearly shows that they had some knowledge of the topic, but did not prepare the topic to the extent needed. Had they done their homework well, they could have certainly participated in a much-more effective manner. Moreover, due to lack of preparation, they did not possess much-needed self-confidence also. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.

Below Average : 1, 4, 8, and 10

These four candidates virtually remained merely observers. More often than that, they were either appreciating the views put forward by other speakers, or asking main speakers to speak. Their own contribution to this Group Discussion was hardly worth mentioning. It clearly indicated that they had not put in much effort to prepare this topic. It needs hardly any emphasis that one cannot put up a good performance in a competitive GD without sufficient preparation. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below Average'.

CSR