

Chinese PM terms India trip historic & successful

AFP, New Delhi

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao yesterday described his four-day India visit as "historic" and as having produced "rich results", while hailing a key agreement with India to resolve a decades-old border dispute.

"We have produced very rich results through this (India) visit," Wen told reporters in New Delhi at the end a four-nation South Asia trip that included stops in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"It is fair to say that this is a historic visit," Wen said adding that when he met host Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday, Singh had told him: "Prime minister, actually we two are making new history."

The two Asian giants, who fought a brief but bitter war in 1962, Monday signed a slew of accords including one that sets out a roadmap for resolving a dragging border issue.

India says China is occupying 38,000 square kilometres (14,670 square miles) of Indian territory in Kashmir illegally ceded to it by Pakistan in the 1950s.

Beijing, in turn, claims that the remote 90,000-square-kilometre Indian-administered state of Arunachal Pradesh belongs to China.

Formal ceasefire line is yet to be established but the unsettled frontier has remained largely peaceful, thanks to agreements signed in 1993 and 1996.

Wen Tuesday hailed the border deal as the "very first political guiding document signed since the resumption of negotiations" in the 1980s to sort out the border dispute.

"This is a sign that we have brought our boundary negotiations to a new stage," he said.

He was referring to China Monday formally burying its decades-old dispute on New Delhi's claims over the former British protectorate of Sikkim after India reiterated Beijing's sovereign right over

and patience and as long as we persevere in this effort, we will be able to build the India-China boundary into a bond of peace and friendship," Wen said.

The Chinese premier also hailed a joint statement he and Singh had signed in which the Asian giants agreed to establish an India-China strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity.

"...We have taken the relations to a new level," Wen said, listing the adoption of a programme to boost two-way trade from 13.6 billion dollars to 20 billion by 2008 and to 30 billion by 2010 as the third "major result" of his trip.

He said the status of the tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim was "no longer an issue" between the world's most populous countries.

Wen left New Delhi for Beijing early afternoon, a foreign ministry official said.

"As long as we have sincerity

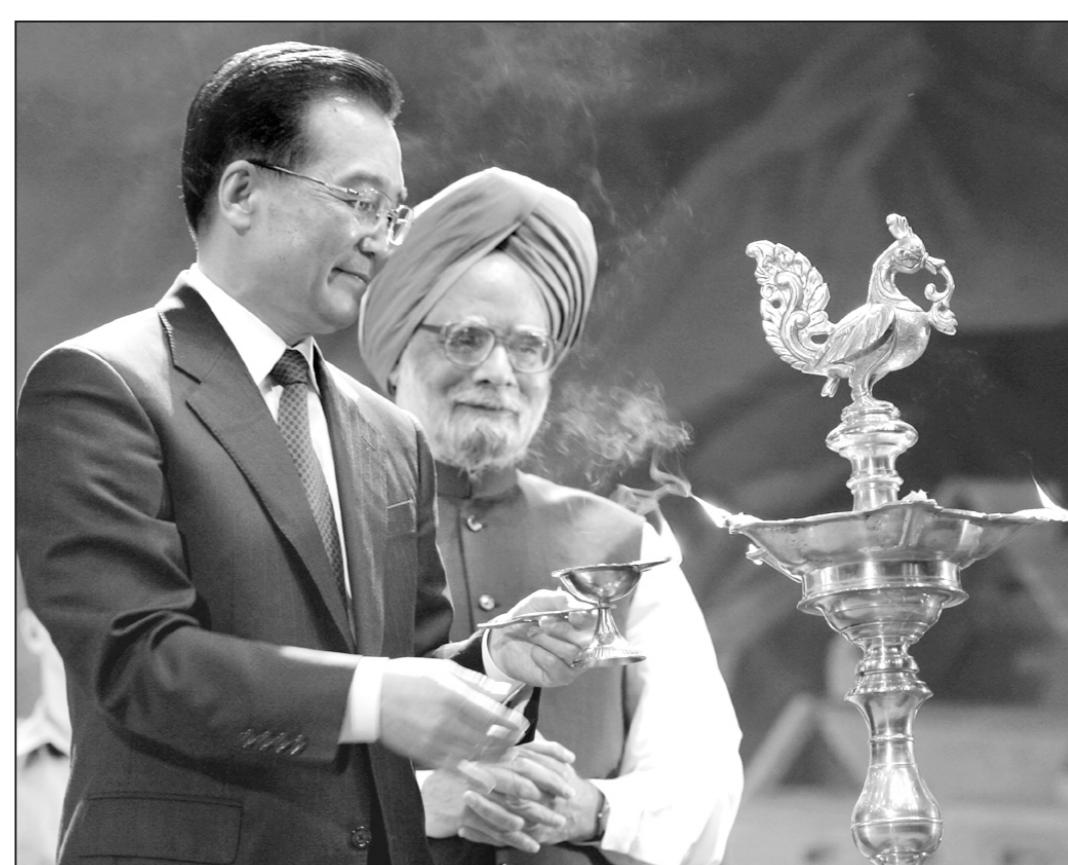
Tibet. Wen said China was working towards setting up a market for border trade adjacent to Sikkim.

"We hope the two sides will make earnest efforts ... to further develop border trade cooperation. This would certainly serve the interests of the people living on the borders," he said.

On the emerging trilateral cooperation between India, China and Russia, Wen said this move should not be construed as an alliance targeting other countries.

India, Russia and China have held several ministerial-level meetings to coordinate their positions on global and regional issues at the United Nations and other international forums.

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'China-Pakistan nuke cooperation in line with NPT'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

China asserted yesterday that its nuclear cooperation with Pakistan is entirely for peaceful purposes and under the safeguard of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Nuclear cooperation between China and Pakistan is completely for peaceful purposes," Premier Wen Jiabao said.

"China-Pakistan cooperation is entirely compliant with the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty)," he said and added that it was under IAEA safeguards.

He was responding to a question whether China's military assistance to Pakistan, particularly for its nuclear and missile programme, would come in the way of realising the full potential of China-India relations.

India and China on Monday agreed to set aside their border dispute and work towards establishing a strategic and cooperative partnership for bilateral peace and prosperity.

Wen, winding up a four-day India visit, told reporters in New Delhi that China's nuclear ties with Islamabad are subject to "the supervision and the safeguards" prescribed by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Prakash Karat replaces Surjeet as CPI(M) general secretary

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

In a generational change of guard in the 41-year-old Communist Party of India (Marxist), British-educated Prakash Karat has taken over as its general secretary replacing 89-year-old Harkishan Singh Surjeet.

Not only that, 56-year-old Karat's wife Brinda, a Bengali in her fifties, became the first woman to become a member of the party's highest policy-making forum the Politburo.

However, the party did not accept the request of 91-year-old former chief minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu to relieve him of being a member of the Politburo because of his age and failing health. Both Basu and Surjeet, who had offered to step down as party general secretary, have been retained in the Politburo.

The choice of Karat as the party general secretary came at the CPI(M)'s party 18th Congress which concluded on Sunday.

Prakash Karat, who had had part of his education in Britain, joined CPI(M) in 1970 and shot to fame as the leader of the party's students' front in Jawaharlal Nehru University here.

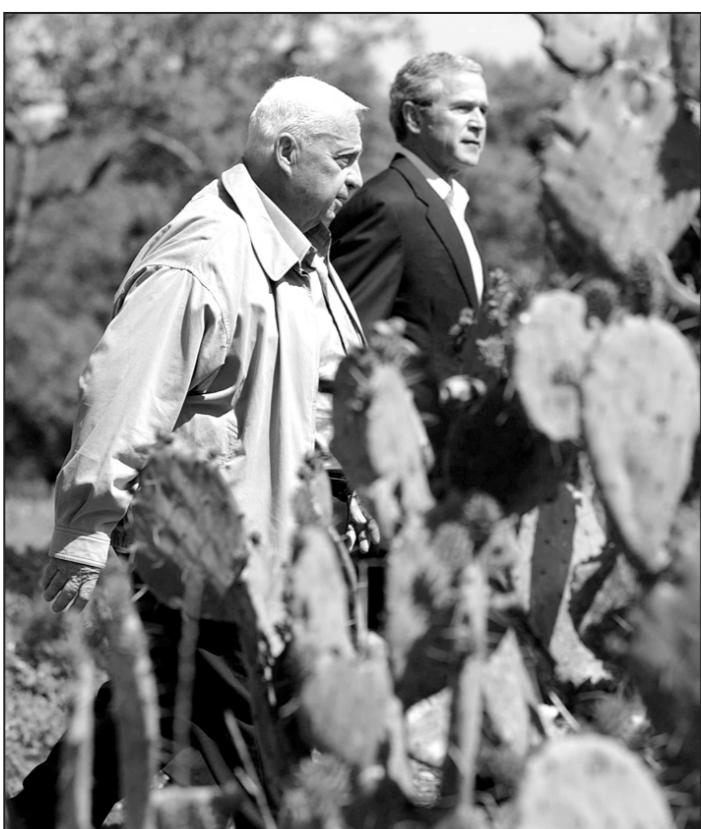


PHOTO: AFP
US President George W. Bush (R) walks with Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to their joint press conference at Bush's Prairie Chapel ranch Monday in Crawford, Texas. Sharon reaffirmed his support for a Palestinian state with contiguous territory in the West Bank after meeting with Bush.

Maoists end road blockade

Nepali army keeps on armed escorts, Kathmandu to allow UN rights monitors, govt official slain

AFP, Kathmandu

An 11-day road blockade called by Nepal's Maoist rebels to protest against King Gyanendra's power grab ended yesterday but the army said it would keep escorting vehicles to prevent guerrilla attacks.

"Army escorts of vehicles coming in and going out of the capital (Kathmandu) will continue for some time," a security official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We're serious about protecting vehicles and the public."

The Maoists called the nationwide blockade to protest against Gyanendra's decision February 1 to dismiss the civilian government and assume absolute power in what the

monarch said was a move to end the deadly insurgency.

The protest was the latest in a series called by the rebels who have been battling since 1996 to topple the monarchy and install a communist government.

Meanwhile, Nepal has agreed to immediately allow United Nations monitors into the country to help prevent human rights abuses, the UN's top human rights official announced Monday, after authorities there came under pressure from their main aid donors.

The blockade launched on April 2 cut the number of buses and trucks on roads in the Kathmandu valley by about 50 percent to 1,500, the security official said.

A senior official of the Federation of the Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, P.R. Pandey, expressed relief at the end of the protest.

Nepal's Maoist rebels have shot dead a government official in the country's remote southwest, police

said yesterday.

The rebels late Monday barged into the home of Balananda Kafle, acting chief district officer of Bardiya district, and gunned him down, a senior police officer said.

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