Geopolitical Experts Discuss a 'New Equilibrium' in India–China Relations at PAFI 13th Annual Forum

Panel Discussion Examines Diplomatic Thaw, Managing Trade Deficits, and Indo-Pacific Security

New Delhi, September 24, 2026 — Decoding diplomatic stabilization, border realities, and economic engagement following recent high-level bilateral talks, distinguished geopolitical and strategic experts Amb. Ashok Kantha, Former Ambassador of India to China; Ashok Malik, Partner and Chair - India Practice, The Asia Group; and Dr. Sanjaya Baru, Former Editor, Financial Express, addressed a panel discussion on India-China relations, organized by the Public Af airs Forum of India (PAFI), India's premier organization focused on public policy and public af airs as part of its 13th Annual Forum in New Delhi.

Amb. Ashok Kantha stated, *"The process of rebuilding the Indo-China relationship has been underway since the Prime Minister met President Xi. We must have stability with China, and we should try to move towards a constructive relationship with China. On the border, there are ongoing conf icts and issues relating to the boundary settlement. China is using force. We cannot ignore the situation where China is constantly trying to change the status quo along the borders. We must have interconnectivity relations. All those issues are not imaginary. They are hurting us. We need to develop capabilities, invest in technology, particularly in technological innovation. That is an obsession for China. We need to learn from this. Reduce dependency on others and make others dependent on you. That is a bold mantra, but it is something we need to understand and learn from. A lot to learn.."*

The session was welcomed by Arijit Sen, President, Vivo Mobile India Private Limited, and moderated by Rahul Sharma, Founding Member & Past President, PAFI, and Managing Director, US India Business Council (USIBC). Following bilateral discussions between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping at the BRICS Summit in New Delhi, institutional dialogue between the two Asian giants has resumed. The panel explored whether this cautious thaw signals a genuine reset or a pragmatic pause, tackling dif icult economic and security questions facing India today including managing a widening trade def cit while safeguarding national security interests.

Ashok Malik, noted, *"With 1.4 billion people, we cannot rely only on imports, particularly because we have a signif cant trade def cit. Opening the Indian mass market through a barrier to Chinese goods remains a concern and was one of the reasons many FTAs began to be reviewed in the second half of the decade. In terms of access to the Indian market, Chinese apps, Chinese AI and Chinese quantum technologies are all areas of increasing relevance. India's trade with China, as well as India's def cit with China, has grown over the* *years, partly because domestic valuation and manufacturing capacity in India was limited. It is important for India to build more domestic manufacturing capability."*

Dr. Sanjaya Baru, observed, *"It is time we try to have a serious discussion about what China means for us, what China means for the world, what China means in terms of business, and what China means in terms of our political relationship. There is very little serious conversation, apart from the usual discussions among the international media and diplomats. Trust is no longer the issue between nations. There is no trust between India and the United States. There is no trust between us and China. What is happening in the world is the rise of a new power. I will not use the strong word that the United States is decisively declining. It is certainly not declining in many f elds. But there is no question that China is the rising power. India, being now the world's most populous country, with a population of 1.4 billion and as a neighbour of China, has to understand the systemic and structural implications of China's rise. We need to think out of the box."*

Arijit Sen added, *"We need a common language, and I don't mean Hindi or English or Mandarin. I'm talking about the language of time. China looks at the f ow of time very dif erently than what India does. I've worked with Indian organizations, U.S. organizations. The long-term plan is f ve years, ten years at best. In China, it's f fty years, hundred years, hundred f fty years. There's a term, the point of long-termism. Unless we look at the f ow of time in a similar, we don't function"*

This session highlighted PAFI's commitment to providing a premier platform for evaluating complex geopolitical shifts and their impact on India's economic security.

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