

'This world will be different, power will be more dispersed, there will be more actors' Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar looks through the Indian prism at the emerging world order in an interview with French media Le Monde

Q: During his last meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping said it was in the common interest of the “Chinese dragon and the Indian elephant to dance together”. What do China and India have in common?

In the history of mankind, our two countries have been very important, and today they are once again taking their place in world affairs. This is a very strong commonality. Because when we talk about rebalancing of the world, it is often rebalancing of Asia, and within Asia, it is primarily of India and China. The fact that we are both on the rise, even though we have different institutions and regimes, means that we have a common interest in defending our interests. G-20 is a very good example of this. Until 2009, there was only the G-7 or G-8, which was very European and very Western. India and China have an interest in expanding the global processes of deliberation. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) also play this role, although to a lesser extent. The rest of the world is not paying as much attention to it as it should.

Q: But China and India are not growing in the same manner....

Neither in the same manner, nor at the same pace. Each has its own challenges. The world was highly dominated by the West - it was totally dominated by the West in 1945, and since then it has gradually changed. It still is the case today though: China and India have a common interest in making the world more inclusive for the different nations of the world.

Q: Is China a rival to India?

In world affairs, we find a very interesting mix of competition and collaboration. Competition because each country, in a common space, looks for what is best for itself. But if there is only pure competition, there is no international order. So, everyone also cooperates so that an international order can exist. We find a balance between cooperation and competition. With China, we are neighbours, we have known each other for a long time. We have made different choices, but in our region, we are not very prescriptive... Of course, everyone believes in the virtues of their model, but it is not in our culture to say it upfront. Let us stop having a one-dimensional vision, real life is more complex! We are two great

countries and it is in our common interest to have good relationships.

Q: Mr Modi has the image of a nationalist leader. Is this an image you accept?

Each country has a different understanding of nationalism, a different history. In the United States, it has an isolationist connotation. In Asia, at least in India, nationalism is a positive word. Nationalists have stood up against colonization, against the domination of the West. There is much to be done with the restoration of identity, of cultural trust. So yes, there is a sense of nationalism in our country. Our people think that the country is doing well; not only are we better perceived, but we can do more for the world. In India, a good nationalist is an internationalist, it is not contradictory. The problem is that you apply your concepts to us.

Q: But doesn't this nationalism cause tensions with the Muslim minority?

No. It is my country that defines my nationality, not my religion, or my caste, or my language. Here in Europe, the link between language, religion and nationality is stronger. The concept of nation is different. In India, we are in a sense a civilization-state, with natural, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. We have never considered uniformity as a necessity or an aspiration.

There are few places in the world where you will see so many people with so many beliefs co-existing. There is a different understanding and appreciation of diversity in Europe. You tend to see us through your prism, you attribute to us a behaviour that you practice yourself. But we are not you!

Moreover, with the progress of democracy and educational standards in India, many more people are participating in the political debate. Today, politics in India is less westernized, less elitist. We are moving more towards what India really is, towards a style more rooted in Indian culture. That's a good thing. Even though the western world sees this as nationalism, it's not so.

Q: Kashmir has been cut-off from the world since 5th August. How long will it continue?

I wouldn't say "cut-off". When the reforms were announced in August, precautions were taken because of the danger of violent reactions from radical and separatist elements. These restrictions have been progressively lifted, and as the situation normalizes, telephone and mobile lines have been restored, shops are open and the apple harvest is underway. The

situation is coming back to normal.

Q: Will foreign journalists be able to go there?

I can't commit to a deadline, but as soon as it is safe, they can go. We don't want their presence to provoke problems - from people who would take advantage of it to show that there is unrest.

Q: The Foreign Minister of Pakistan recently described relations with India as "close to zero". Is that your assessment as well?

The relationship is difficult since many years, mainly because Pakistan has developed a large terrorist industry and sends terrorists to India to carry out attacks. Pakistan itself does not deny this situation. Now, tell me: which country would be willing to talk and negotiate with a neighbour who openly practices terrorism against it? If one of your neighbours did, would you, France, pretend that everything is fine? We need actions that demonstrate a real willingness to cooperate. For example, there are Indians wanted for terrorist activities living in Pakistan. We are telling Pakistan: hand them over to us.

Q: Donald Trump and his policy have profoundly changed the transatlantic relationship. How do you deal with it?

There is an important distinction: Europe is anchored in an alliance system. The changes that occurred in the United States had an impact on the alliance system - not only on Europe, but also on Japan. We have never been in an alliance arrangement. We are used to dealing with international relations on our own. Our mindset allows us to better deal with unpredictability. These changes are not only in the United States, there are also many changes in Asia, the emergence of China, India, ASEAN. We are in a completely different world. We tend to consider the post-1945 bipolar world and the post-1992 American world as norm. But look at the history of the world. Things change, nothing is engraved in stone. This world will be different, power will be more dispersed, there will be more actors...

Q: Do you see Europe becoming one of these actors?

The President of the European Commission (Ursula von der Leyen) hopes for Europe to have a greater geopolitical role. This seems to be a European aspiration. We are in favour of it. We are a deeply democratic country. We believe in consultation, diversity, and pluralism - at home and around the world. And in a democratic world, Europe must have a greater role.

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