

## China-obsessed US doesn't understand India: US scholar

For those waxing lyrical about the India-US bonhomie riding high on the back of a civil nuclear deal, here is a sobering reminder from well-known American scholar Richard Smith: the US is too preoccupied with China to understand India well.

'The Americans don't have a good understanding of India. For all the talk about India and the US coming closer, the Americans are much too preoccupied with China,' Smith, a leading China expert and professor of history at Rice University, Houston, told IANS in an interview here.

'The Americans have had a romantic, idealised picture of China for long. This preoccupation with China has prevented a better understanding of India,' Smith said while alluding to the hype and hoopla about India and the US coming closer in a strategic partnership, especially after their joint statement on a landmark civil nuclear deal nearly two years ago.

Smith, author of seminal books like 'China's Cultural Heritage', was in India recently to deliver a lecture, as part of the 'Beyond Borders' series organised by WorldWise, a global skills firm that aims at enhancing collaboration and understanding between India and China.

It is not that the Americans are in love with the Chinese dragon; on the contrary, there is some anxiety about the rise of China, said Smith, adding that given this backdrop it would be naive to imagine that the US will not use its relationship with India as a 'lever' to contain a rising China.

But this does not mean India will join the US containment strategy as its relations with China necessitate cooperation rather than confrontation or rivalry, said Smith, a member of the National Committee on US-China relations.

'True, there is legacy of mistrust and misunderstanding between India and China,' said Smith while alluding to the 1962 invasion of India by China.

Smith is a co-founder of the 'Transnational China Project' at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy that seeks to promote scholarly research and better public understanding of Chinese politics and history.

'Although the relationship will never be smooth and there will be bumps on the way, mutual interests will ensure that both countries will cooperate for mutual gains,' he said.

'China and India would participate in a multi-centred world. Trade between them is growing. There is little likelihood of any major confrontation or war between them,' he said.

The world, however, needs to watch the Chinese nationalism carefully and the forms in which it express itself as the Chinese have a strong sense of their country's place in the world, he noted.

'They would like the Chinese culture to spread much in the same manner as the Americans do. However, the world will not allow any monolithic imperialism with hegemonic intent to succeed,' Smith said when asked whether China is nurturing imperialistic ambitions as it asserts itself to become a major world power.

'The Chinese are actually proud of their economic growth. They are acutely aware of their place in the world,' he said.

Between India and China, who wins the race in what is set to be an Asian century?

'Statistics are favouring China. But India is also on the move. Things go slow in democracy. India has certainly many reasons like high economic growth and a rapidly expanding middle class to feel good about itself,' he said.

Smith also made a passionate plea for the two emerging Asian giants to better understand each other's culture and value systems. 'My mantra is: in order to understand ourselves we have to understand the other,' said Smith while quoting a saying from Sun Zi, a Chinese thinker and military strategist.

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