

Premier Chou En-lai's Letter to Prime Minister Nehru

(September 8, 1959)

Peking, September 8, 1959

His Excellency Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru,
Prime Minister of the Republic of India,
New Delhi

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I have carefully read Your Excellency's letter dated March 22, 1959. I find from your letter that there is a fundamental difference between the positions of our two Governments on the Sino-Indian boundary question. This has made me somewhat surprised and also made it necessary for me to take a longer period of time to consider how to reply to your letter.

The Sino-Indian boundary question is a complicated question left over by history. In tackling this question, one cannot but, first of all, take into account the historical background of British aggression on China when India was under British rule. From the early days, Britain harboured aggressive ambition towards China's Tibet region. It continuously instigated Tibet to separate from China, in an attempt to put under its control a

nominally independent Tibet. When this design failed, it applied all sorts of pressures on China, intending to make Tibet a British sphere of influence while allowing China to maintain so-called suzerainty over Tibet. In the meantime, using India as its base, Britain conducted extensive territorial expansion into China's Tibet region, and even the Sinkiang region. All this constitutes the fundamental reason for the long-term disputes over and non-settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question.

China and India are both countries which were long subjected to imperialist aggression. This common experience should have naturally caused China and India to hold an identical view of the above-said historical background and to adopt an attitude of mutual sympathy, mutual understanding and fairness and reasonableness in dealing with the boundary question. The Chinese Government originally thought the Indian Government would take such an attitude. Unexpectedly to the Chinese Government, however, the Indian Government demanded that the Chinese Government give formal recognition to the conditions created by the application of the British policy of aggression against China's Tibet region as the foundation for the settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question. What is more serious, the Indian Government has applied all sorts of pressures on the Chinese Government, not even scrupling the use of force, to support this demand. At this the Chinese Government cannot but feel a deep regret.

The Chinese Government has consistently held that an overall settlement of the boundary question should be sought by both sides taking into account the historical background and existing actualities and adhering to the

five principles, through friendly negotiations conducted in a well-prepared way step by step. Pending this, as a provisional measure, the two sides should maintain the long-existing status quo of the border, and not seek to change it by unilateral action, even less by force; as to some of the disputes, provisional agreements concerning isolated places could be reached through negotiations to ensure the tranquillity of the border areas and uphold the friendship of the two countries. This is exactly the basic idea expressed in my January 23, 1959 letter to you. The Chinese Government still considers this to be the way that should be followed by our two countries in settling the boundary question. Judging from Your Excellency's letter of March 22, 1959, it seems you are not completely against this principle.

I would like now to further explain the position of the Chinese Government in connection with the questions raised in Your Excellency's letter and in conjunction with the recent situation along the Sino-Indian border.

I. In my letter to Your Excellency dated January 23, 1959, I pointed out that the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited. In your letter of March 22, 1959, Your Excellency expressed disagreement to this, and tried energetically to prove that most parts of the Sino-Indian boundary had the sanction of specific international agreements between the past government of India and Central Government of China. In order to prove that the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited, I would like to furnish the following facts:

(One) Concerning the boundary separating China's Sinkiang and Tibet regions from Ladakh

In 1842, a peace treaty was indeed concluded between the local authorities of China's Tibet and the Kashmir authorities. However, the then Chinese Central Government did not send anybody to participate in the conclusion of this treaty, nor did it ratify the treaty afterwards. Moreover, this treaty only mentioned in general terms that Ladakh and Tibet would each abide by its borders, and did not make any specific provisions or explanations regarding the location of this section of the boundary. It is clear that this treaty cannot be used to prove that this section of the boundary has been formally delimited by the two sides, even less can it be used as the foundation to ask the Chinese Government to accept the unilateral claim of the Indian Government regarding this section of the boundary. As to the Chinese Government official's statement made in 1847 to the British representative that this section of the boundary was clear, it can only show that the then Chinese Government had its own clear view regarding this section of the boundary and cannot be taken as a proof that the boundary between the two sides had already been formally delimited. As a matter of fact, down to 1899, the British Government still proposed to formally delimit this section of the boundary with the Chinese Government, but the Chinese Government did not agree. Your Excellency also said on August 28 this year in India's Lok Sabha: "This was the boundary of the old Kashmir state with Tibet and Chinese Turkestan. Nobody had marked it." It can thus be seen that this section of the boundary has never been delimited. Between China and Ladakh, however, there does exist a customary line derived from historical traditions, and Chinese maps have always drawn the boundary between

China and Ladakh in accordance with this line. The marking of this section of the boundary on the map of *Punjab, Western Himalaya and Adjoining Parts of Tibet* compiled by the British John Walker by order of the Court of Directors of the East India Company (which was attached to the British Major Alexander Cunningham's book *Ladakh* published in 1854) corresponded fairly close to the Chinese maps. Later British and Indian maps included large tracts of Chinese territory into Ladakh. This was without any legal grounds, nor in conformity with the actual situation of administration by each side all the time.

(Two) Concerning the section of the boundary between the Ari area of China's Tibet and India

It can be seen from your letter that you also agree that this section of the boundary has not been formally delimited by the two countries. Not only so, there have in fact been historical disputes between the two sides over the right to many places in this area. For example, the area of Sang and Tsungsha, southwest of Tsaparang Dzong in Tibet, which had always belonged to China, was thirty to forty years back gradually invaded and occupied by the British. The local authorities of China's Tibet took up the matter several times with Britain, without any results. It has thus become an outstanding issue left over by history.

(Three) Concerning the Sino-Indian boundary east of Bhutan

The Indian Government insists that this section of the boundary has long been clearly delimited, citing as its grounds that the so-called McMahon Line was jointly delineated by the representatives of the Chinese Govern-

ment, the Tibet local authorities and the British Government at the 1913-1914 Simla Conference. As I have repeatedly made clear to Your Excellency, the Simla Conference was an important step taken by Britain in its design to detach Tibet from China. At the conference were discussed the so-called boundary between outer and inner Tibet and that between Tibet and the rest of China. Contrary to what was said in your letter, the so-called McMahon Line was never discussed at the Simla Conference, but was determined by the British representative and the representative of the Tibet local authorities behind the back of the representative of the Chinese Central Government through an exchange of secret notes at Delhi on March 24, 1914, that is, prior to the signing of the Simla Treaty. This line was later marked on the map attached to the Simla Treaty as part of the boundary between Tibet and the rest of China. The so-called McMahon Line was a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibet region of China and has never been recognized by any Chinese Central Government and is therefore decidedly illegal. As to the Simla Treaty, it was not formally signed by the representative of the then Chinese Central Government, and this is explicitly noted in the treaty. For quite a long time after the exchange of secret notes between Britain and the Tibet local authorities, Britain dared not make public the related documents, nor change the traditional way of drawing this section of the boundary on maps. This illegal line aroused the great indignation of the Chinese people. The Tibet local authorities themselves later also expressed their dissatisfaction with this line, and, following the independence of India in 1947, cabled Your Excellency asking India to return all

the territory of the Tibet region of China south of this illegal line. This piece of territory corresponds in size to Chekiang Province of China and is as big as 90,000 square kilometres. Mr. Prime Minister, how could China agree to accept under coercion such an illegal line which would have it relinquish its rights and disgrace itself by selling out its territory — and such a large piece of territory at that? The delineation of the Sino-Indian boundary east of Bhutan in all traditional Chinese maps is a true reflection of the actual situation of the traditional boundary before the appearance of the so-called McMahon Line. Both the map of *Tibet and Adjacent Countries* published by the Indian Survey in 1917 and the map attached to the 1929 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* drew this section of the boundary in the same way as the Chinese maps. And it was only in the period around the peaceful liberation of China's Tibet region in 1951 that Indian troops advanced on a large scale into the area south of the so-called McMahon Line. Therefore, the assertion that this section of the boundary has long been clearly delimited is obviously untenable.

In Your Excellency's letter, you also referred to the boundary between China and Sikkim. Like the boundary between China and Bhutan, this question does not fall within the scope of our present discussion. I would like, however, to take this opportunity to make clear once again that China is willing to live together in friendship with Sikkim and Bhutan, without committing aggression against each other, and has always respected the proper relations between them and India.

It can be seen from the above that the way the Sino-Indian boundary has always been drawn in maps pub-

lished in China is not without grounds and that at first British and Indian maps also drew the Sino-Indian boundary roughly in the same way as the Chinese maps. As a matter of fact, it was not Chinese maps, but British and Indian maps that later unilaterally altered the way the Sino-Indian boundary was drawn. Nevertheless, since China and India have not delimited their mutual boundary through friendly negotiations and joint surveys, China has not asked India to revise its maps. In 1954, I explained to Your Excellency for the same reason that it would be inappropriate for the Chinese Government to revise the old map right now. Some people in India, however, are raising a big uproar about the maps published in China, attempting to create a pressure of public opinion to force China to accept India's unilateral claims concerning the Sino-Indian boundary. Needless to say, this is neither wise nor worthy.

II. As stated above, the Chinese Government has all along adhered to a clear-cut policy on the Sino-Indian border question: On the one hand, it affirms the fact that the entire Sino-Indian boundary has not been delimited, while on the other, it also faces reality, and, taking specially into consideration the friendly relationship between China and India, actively seeks for a settlement fair and reasonable to both sides, and never tries unilaterally to change the long-existing state of the border between the two countries pending the settlement of the boundary question.

Regarding the eastern section of the Sino-Indian boundary, as I have stated above, the Chinese Government absolutely does not recognize the so-called McMahon Line, but Chinese troops have never crossed that

line. This is for the sake of maintaining amity along the border to facilitate negotiations and settlement of the boundary question, and in no way implies that the Chinese Government has recognized that line. In view of the fact that my former explanation of this point to Your Excellency is obviously misunderstood in Your Excellency's latest two letters to me, I have deemed it necessary once again to make the above explanation clearly.

Regarding the western section of the Sino-Indian boundary, China has strictly abided by the traditional customary line, and, with regard to Indian troops' repeated intrusions into or occupation of Chinese territory, the Chinese Government, acting always in a friendly manner, has dealt with each case in a way befitting it. For example, regarding the invasion of Wuje by Indian troops and administrative personnel, the Chinese Government has tried its best to seek a settlement with the Indian Government through negotiations and to avoid a clash. Regarding the Indian troops who invaded the southwestern part of China's Sinkiang and the area of Lake Pangong in the Tibet region of China, the Chinese frontier guards, after disarming them according to international practice, adopted an attitude of reasoning, asking them to leave Chinese territory and returning to them their arms. Regarding the Indian troops' successive invasion and occupation of the areas of Shipki Pass, Parigas, Sang, Tsungsha, Puling-Sumdo, Chuva, Chuje, Sangcha and Lapthal, the Chinese Government, after discovering these happenings, invariably conducted thorough and detailed investigations rather than laying charges against the Indian Government immediately and temperamentally. These measures

prove that the Chinese Government is exerting its greatest effort to uphold Sino-Indian friendship.

Despite the above-mentioned border incidents caused wholly by the trespassing of Indian troops, until the beginning of this year, the atmosphere along the Sino-Indian border had on the whole been fairly good. The fact that no armed clash had ever occurred along the two thousand or so kilometres of the Sino-Indian boundary, which is wholly undelimited, is in itself a powerful proof that, given a friendly and reasonable attitude on both sides, amity can be maintained in the border areas and tension ruled out pending the delimitation of the boundary between the two countries.

III. Since the outbreak of the rebellion in Tibet, however, the border situation has become increasingly tense owing to reasons for which the Chinese side cannot be held responsible. Immediately after the fleeing of large numbers of Tibetan rebels into India, Indian troops started pressing forward steadily across the eastern section of the Sino-Indian boundary. Changing unilaterally the long-existing state of the border between the two countries, they not only overstepped the so-called McMahon Line as indicated in the map attached to the secret notes exchanged between Britain and the Tibet local authorities, but also exceeded the boundary drawn on current Indian maps which is alleged to represent the so-called McMahon Line, but which in many places actually cuts even deeper into Chinese territory than the McMahon Line. Indian troops invaded and occupied Longju, intruded into Yasher, and are still in occupation of Shatze, Khinzemane and Tamaden — all of which are Chinese territory — shielding armed Tibetan rebel bandits in this area. Indian air-

craft have also time and again violated China's territorial air near the Sino-Indian border. What is especially regrettable is that, not long ago, the Indian troops unlawfully occupying Longju launched armed attacks on the Chinese frontier guards stationing at Migyitun, leaving no room for the Chinese frontier guards but fire back in self-defence. This was the first instance of armed clash along the Sino-Indian border. It can be seen from the above that the tense situation recently arising on the Sino-Indian border was all caused by trespassing and provocations by Indian troops, and that for this the Indian side should be held fully responsible. Nevertheless, the Indian Government has directed all sorts of groundless charges against the Chinese Government, clamouring that China has committed aggression against India and describing the Chinese frontier guards' act of self-defence in the Migyitun area as armed provocation. Many political figures and propaganda organs in India have seized the occasion to make a great deal of anti-Chinese utterances, some even openly advocating provocative actions of an even larger scale such as bombarding Chinese territory. Thus, a second anti-Chinese campaign has been launched in India in six months' time. The fact that India does not recognize the undelimited state of the Sino-Indian boundary and steps up bringing pressure to bear on China militarily, diplomatically and through public opinion cannot but make one suspect that it is the attempt of India to impose upon China its one-sided claims on the boundary question. It must be pointed out that this attempt will never succeed, and such action cannot possibly yield any results other than impairing the friendship of the two

countries, further complicating the boundary question and making it more difficult to settle.

IV. The friendly relations between China and India are based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. The Chinese Government has consistently held that all differences between our two countries must and certainly can be resolved through peaceful consultations and should not be allowed to affect the friendly relationship between the two countries. China looks upon its southwestern border as a border of peace and friendship. I can assure Your Excellency that it is merely for the purpose of preventing remnant armed Tibetan rebels from crossing the border back and forth to carry out harassing activities that the Chinese Government has in recent months dispatched guard units to be stationed in the southeastern part of the Tibet region of China. This is obviously in the interests of ensuring the tranquillity of the border and will in no way constitute a threat to India. Your Excellency is one of the initiators of the five principles and has made significant contributions to the consolidation and development of Sino-Indian friendship and constantly stressed the importance of this friendship. This has deeply impressed the Chinese Government and people. I have therefore given Your Excellency a systematic explanation of the whole picture of the Sino-Indian boundary. I hope that Your Excellency and the Indian Government will, in accordance with the Chinese Government's request, immediately adopt measures to withdraw the trespassing Indian troops and administrative personnel and restore the long-existing state of the boundary between the two countries. Through this, the temporary tension on the Sino-Indian border would be eased at once and the

dark clouds hanging over the relations between our two countries would be speedily dispelled, setting at ease our friends who are concerned for Sino-Indian friendly relations and dealing a blow to those who are sowing discord in the Sino-Indian relations and creating tension.

With cordial regards,

(Signed)

CHOU EN-LAI

*Premier of the State Council of the
People's Republic of China*

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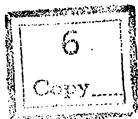
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