

NOTE

China, Vietnam, Oil

A Correspondent writes :

INDIA AND PAKISTAN CANNOT LIVE in peace. So do China and Vietnam. Border skirmishes between two officially recognised communist countries during the Deng era shattered the myth of communist solidarity. It is nationalism that plays havoc in these post-revolutionary societies. Of late the bone of contention between China and Vietnam is over oil lying untapped in South China sea.

South China sea contains vast oil and gas reserves, and consolidates sea lanes for key trade routes and abundant fish stocks. China, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan claim part or all of the South China Sea. The Shangri-La Dialogue, a high-profile annual Asia defence forum held in June 2011, and attended by Liang Guanglie, the Chinese defence minister and Robert Gates, the US defence secretary, was overshadowed by renewed tensions between China and Vietnam. The tensions have escalated as China and Vietnam accuse each other of violating its sovereignty in the oil-rich South China Sea. Petro-Vietnam, the state-owned oil and gas monopoly accuses China of sabotaging Vietnamese oil exploration vessels. When the Vietnamese conduct seismic survey and drilling operations, Chinese aeroplanes fly overhead to monitor activities. Chinese vessels have cut exploration cables. Beijing's increasingly assertive actions in regional, disputed waters, have made south-east Asian countries more concerned. Maybe, another Middle East is in the making. Ironically USA is offering to act as a mediator, since South China sea is strategically important to the US. A number of large international oil companies, including Exxon-Mobil and Chevron are working with Petro Vietnam, to explore and develop oil and gas assets in South China Sea waters, claimed by Vietnam. China has been deliberately cutting Vietnam's exploration cables, submerged to 30 meters. Then material interests matter, not communism and socialism. □□□