

## Sentimental Zardari

C. Raja Mohan

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When it comes to its relations with China, Pakistan's leaders believe there is no room for understatement. As Pakistan passes through a difficult period, its leaders are clinging onto the China relationship tighter than ever before. Traveling through eastern China during the last few days, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari outdid his predecessors in praising his hosts. Writing in Monday's China Daily, Zardari declared: "that the Pakistan-China friendship is higher than the peaks of Himalayas is now a truism without exaggeration". Zardari was also eager to remind his hosts of the Bhutto family's long connection to Beijing. "The Pakistan Peoples Party and our family have had a three-generation relationship with China.

From Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and then my late wife Shaheed Benazir Bhutto to my son and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the friendship continues into the future." Zardari also repeated his offer to let Beijing develop and use Pakistan's ports linking China's western provinces to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. "Pakistani ports of Karachi, Port Qasim and Gwadar are nearer to the Chinese heartland than Shanghai and Hong Kong. Pakistan can also help channel energy supplies from the Gulf to China," Zardari said. During his trip, the second in his brief tenure as the President of Pakistan, Zardari was not received by his formal equal, President Hu Jintao. He was hosted, instead, by state councillor, Dai Bingguo. Unsentimental CCP Unlike Zardari, China has no reason to be sentimental about its relationship with Pakistan. Beijing is stepping up pressure on Pakistan to do more against the anti-China terror organisations operating on its soil. While Beijing does not publicly blame Islamabad for terrorist acts in China, the provincial government in Xinjiang province has been a lot less hesitant in pointing fingers at the various training camps in the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Responding to the political heat from Beijing, Zardari declared that "Pakistan is fighting terrorists not only for its own sake but for the entire region. We are determined not to allow the noxious fumes of this dangerous phenomenon and ideology to spread to other countries." "Indeed terrorists have specifically targeted some of our Chinese friends who were working in Pakistan to drive a wedge between the two countries and peoples," Zardari added. Aware of Zardari's manifest political weaknesses and the unfolding political turbulence in Islamabad, the Chinese Communist Party is now reaching out to all the major political forces in Pakistan. Earlier this month, Liu Hongcai, the deputy head of the CCP's International Liaison Department (ILD) signed an MoU on relations with Pakistan's Jamaat e Islami. This week Liu was in Pakistan; among his political interlocutors was Nawaz Sharif. ILD stars Liu, considered one of the rising stars of the Chinese foreign policy establishment, has often shown up in Kathmandu. Those in India who do make an effort to remember Chinese names and institutions should stumble frequently on the mysterious ILD. Do recall that Dai Bingguo, Zardari's host, was Beijing's special representative in the stalled talks on the boundary dispute with India. Dai, recently promoted to the State Council (China's super cabinet), has for long been the head of the powerful International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party. Liu Hongcai who was with Nawaz Sharif in Lahore happens to be the deputy head of the ILD. The ILD is perhaps one of the most powerful but least understood organisations of the CCP; its growing profile around the sub-continent, and its widespread engagement with the political forces in our neighbourhood should make it an important object of study for New Delhi. Maldives play After President Hu Jintao traveled to Mauritius on a high profile visit earlier this month, his defence minister Liang Guanglie received in Beijing last week the defence minister of Maldives, Ameen Faisal. Xinhua quotes Liang as "vowing to expand bilateral military cooperation" with Maldives. As China seeks to develop a credible presence in the Indian Ocean, Beijing's attention to Maldives is likely to be intensive and sustained. It

may be recalled that Faisal, who represents the new democratic dispensation in Maldives, was in New Delhi a few weeks ago and received by Defence Minister AK Antony and External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee.