



Don't forget Tibet

January 14, 2008

Despite improvements in Sino-Indian relations, Manmohan Singh, who is on an official visit to Beijing, his first as Prime Minister, should not ignore the denial of human rights in Tibet. It's as much in the interest of Tibetans as that of Indians

You must have been delighted to read, "Yoga catches the fancy of Chinese soldiers." PTI reported: "As much as learning anti-terror skills from the Indian Army, Yoga too has caught the fancy of the Chinese troops... The PLA men seemed to have been swayed by Yoga, they are learning *pranayam*, which is believed to do wonders in physical and psychological performance, and *asanas* from instructors of the Indian Army." Today, 'bonhomie' is the term used by the Indian media to describe the Indo-Chinese relations.

'Experts' are optimistic: Year 2008 is going to be special. During this leap year, Beijing will organise the Olympic Games for the first time in modern history. In ancient Greece, this was traditionally a time of 'truce', during which athletes, along with artists and pilgrims, often with their entire families, travelled to attend or participate in the Olympic Games before returning in total safety to their respective countries. Analysts will tell you that Beijing has decided to follow the old tradition.

As proof, they cite not only the joint exercises conducted by the Indian Army with its Chinese counterpart, but also the visit of the UPA chairperson to China in October. However, one issue remains a spoke in the wheel. It is a rather large one; one quarter of China's landmass which for centuries has been the buffer between India and China -- Tibet.

The renewed 'friendship' became obvious as soon as the UPA chairperson came back from Beijing, Cabinet Secretary KM Chandrashekar issued a directive to ban Union Ministers from attending a function organised to felicitate the Dalai Lama, who had received the US Congressional Gold Medal. The Chinese immediately congratulated the Government of India for its 'courageous' stand! The point is that the Indian people and even politicians are genuinely fond of the Tibetan leader, who commands enormous respect. It seems that despite the ban, the Delhi Chief Minister attended a function with the Dalai Lama the next day in the capital. The philosophy and actions of the Buddhist leader have a tremendous appeal to those who believe in Indian ethos. Rumours suggest that senior South Block functionaries attended the Dalai Lama's teachings a few months back. The Chinese are wrong if they believe that the age-old bond between India and Tibet will be dissolved just to appease them.

Many Indians are worried by the rapid deterioration of the political scene inside Tibet during the last year. Even without mentioning the train, which is expected to bring five million settlers, troops and tourists to the 'roof of the world' in 2008, the last year has been a horrible year for the people of Tibet.

Recently, the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), an independent NGO working on human rights, stated: "In

the past 11 months, the human rights and freedom of Tibetans in Tibet have witnessed an unprecedented beating at the hands of Chinese authorities."

Though awarded the 2008 Olympics Games, Beijing continues to practice a systematic denial of human rights. A few examples highlight the worsening situation on the Tibetan plateau. On January 1, 2007, a set of 'Measures for the Regulation on Religious Affairs' was promulgated by the Government of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The new regulation, however, was not meant to provide freedom of religion; in March, it was used to ban Tibetan Communist Party members and civil servants in Lhasa from visiting temples. Why? Because the National People's Congress was being held in Beijing at that time. According to TCHRD, "(Officials) were issued stark warning of facing expulsion and dismissal, if they prayed at Buddhist temples in the Capital."

On May 17, 2007, the Communist Government in Beijing decided to implement the 'Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism'. The new policy was denounced as "ludicrous and unwarranted" by the Dalai Lama's Government-in-exile.

The Dalai Lama was the main target; it was for Beijing's way of taking revenge for the growing popularity of the Tibetan leader. The 'Measures' state: "Reincarnating living Buddhas should respect and protect the principles of the unification of the state, protecting the unity of the minorities, protecting religious concord and social harmony. (They)... may not re-establish feudal privileges which have already been abolished." The 14 articles of the 'Measures' describe in great detail how "reincarnating living Buddhas should carry out

application and approval procedures". In September, the party took over the monopoly over the selection.

On July 19, 2007, the Public Security Bureau of Nagchuka County arrested two elderly women -- Odho and Apha Bomo. Their crime was to have asked for the release an imprisoned Tibetan, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. This reincarnate Lama from Lithang in the Kham Province was arrested in 2002 and charged with alleged involvement in a series of bombings. He was later condemned to death without a proper trial, just because his popularity had risen high after his commendable social work. Despite several campaigns for his release, he is still in jail without proper trial.

On August 1, 2007, a Tibetan nomad chief, Runggyal Adak, spoke on the occasion of the annual horse race festival in Lithang, Eastern Tibet. He criticised the lack of religious freedom in Tibet and asked for the Dalai Lama's return. He was immediately arrested.

During the following days, the situation deteriorated and hundreds of Tibetans staged a protest around the police station where Adak was detained. The authorities had to rush additional contingents of People's Armed Police (PAP) to check the situation. Finally, some local Tibetan leaders urged the nomads to leave in order to avoid a bloody confrontation. According to the Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Adak was prosecuted for "masterminding" the August 1 incident and "inciting to subvert state power". On November 20, 2007, he was convicted to eight years of imprisonment. Subsequently, a purge of the local leadership started in several counties and Tibetans officials were replaced by Chinese. As a consequence to the Lithang incident, the Chinese authorities started a 'Patriotic Education Campaign' in Eastern Tibet in September. Those who did not obey were jailed. A number of incidents of PAP

destroying statues of the Buddha or Guru Padmasambhava have also been reported. On October 18, Tibetans fleeing to Nepal through the Nangpa Pass was reported were shot upon; nine have gone missing and four were arrested from the initial group of 46 Tibetans.

The Government of China's announcement strikes primarily at the current negotiations which started with China in 2002 (six rounds have been held so far) and more particularly at the 'genuine autonomy' envisaged by the Dalai Lama.

A recent Report released by the Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala lists hundreds of other issues such as the forced changed life of the nomads, the poor state of education, the unemployment and social exclusion, the urban inequalities, the damming of rivers in Tibet (Brahmaputra is one of them), the extraction of natural resources or the collateral of tourism on the roof of the World. The list goes on. All this is happening in the country which is organising the next Olympics. But where is the Olympic spirit?

India should not forget the services rendered by the Tibetans commandos, particularly during the 1971 Operations or the Kargil conflict. Tibetan jawans have sacrificed their lives to defend Mother India, a country which is not their own. Let us hope that the Prime Minister will not ignore these issues during his visit to China.