



A Tibetan wails during a protest rally outside the Chinese Embassy's visa office in Kathmandu —AP



**SOLIQUIES**

By Soli J Sorabjee

## Growing intolerance

**R**IGHT to dissent is the essence of democracy. Intolerance has an inhibiting effect on freedom of thought and discussion and is incompatible with a plural liberal democracy. Our Supreme Court has vindicated tolerance. Three students of Jehovah's Witnesses faith refused to sing the Indian national anthem because they were forbidden by their religious beliefs to sing the national anthem of any country. The students were expelled. The Supreme Court struck down the expulsions. The Court concluded with a ringing note: "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our Constitution practices tolerance; let us not dilute it."

The Supreme Court in its recent judgment upholding a partial temporary ban imposed on slaughter of cattle in municipal slaughter houses in Ahmedabad noticed the "growing tendency of intolerance in our country". Justice Markandey Katju speaking for the Court deplored that "these days unfortunately some people seem to be perpetually on a short fuse, and are willing to protest often violently, about anything under the sun on the ground that a book or painting or film etc. has hurt the sentiments of their community. These are dangerous tendencies and must be curbed with an iron hand. We are one nation and must respect each other and should have tolerance".

The crucial point is that tolerance cannot be legislated nor can it be enforced by judgments. We must develop the capacity for tolerance by fostering an environment of tolerance, a culture of tolerance. Education has a vital role to play in this connection. Indeed the highest result of education is tolerance.

**Unusual Award:** There is an infinite variety of awards which are conferred on persons dead or alive. The 'bad sex' fiction award is quite unique. The rationale is to draw attention to the crude, tasteless, often perfunctory use of redundant passages of sexual description in the modern novel, and to discourage it. Some distinguished recipients of the award are A A Gill and Melvyn Bragg. The latest to receive this award posthumously is the late Norman Mailer for his book *The Castle in the Forest* published in 2007. Mailer's award winning passage described a penis as an "old battering ram". India is not absent. In 1993 Aniruddha Bahal won the award for describing sex as a "cross-country" rally.

Dicken's *Pickwick Papers* is thoroughly enjoyable especially after the entry of Sam Weller with his inexhaustible fund of similes: "Glad to meet you as the gentleman said to the five pound note". Another one is, "Quite enough to get Sir, as the soldier said when they ordered him 350 lashes". He was rebuked by the presiding judge in the famous trial of Bardell vs Pickwick. "You must not tell us what the soldier said, it's not evidence". In *Pickwick Papers* there is laughter and pathos, humour and wit without a litter of four letter words and nauseating descriptions of sexual activities.

**Names Do Matter:** "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/By any other word would smell as sweet", so we are told by Shakespeare. Experience however establishes that names do matter. Common questions amongst lawyers and even the judges are which counsel argued the case and which judge delivered the judgment.

In an affidavit filed in the Delhi high court, the Home Ministry said that a large number of VIPs were enjoying high-level security and government accommodation by exaggerating the level of threat to their security. The Court was informed of the proposal to change the nomenclature "VIP security" to "personal security" because many seeking protection interpreted security as a status symbol. This proposal has irked many because the words "Very Important Persons" (VIP) have a different tone and significance.

If good old Feroze Gandhi had a traditional Parsi surname like Daruwalla or Sopariwala the name Sonia Daruwalla would not be as charismatic as the surname Gandhi. Young Rahul in his recent talk to students in Mangalore with his characteristic frankness admitted that he has an edge in politics due to his surname. Shakespeare saheb, names and words do matter, certainly in India.

# A deadly rehearsal

## What does 'people's war' mean in Tibet?

By CLAUDE ARPI

**A**S Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao were reelected to their posts of President and Premier of the People's Republic of China at the end of the 11th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), bad news was in store for them.

As in March 1989 in Lhasa (and three months later on the Tiananmen Square), 'people' demonstrated against the Beijing regime. Today, there is only a minor difference: Premier Wen Jiabao, who was seen with his mentor Zhao Ziyang on the side of the students in June 1989, is now with the apparatchiks.

After riots erupted last week in Lhasa and spread to different parts of Tibet during the following days, the immediate reaction of the Chinese authorities was the customary Party line: "We must wage a people's war to expose and condemn the malicious acts of these hostile forces and expose the hideous face of the Dalai Lama group to the light of day."

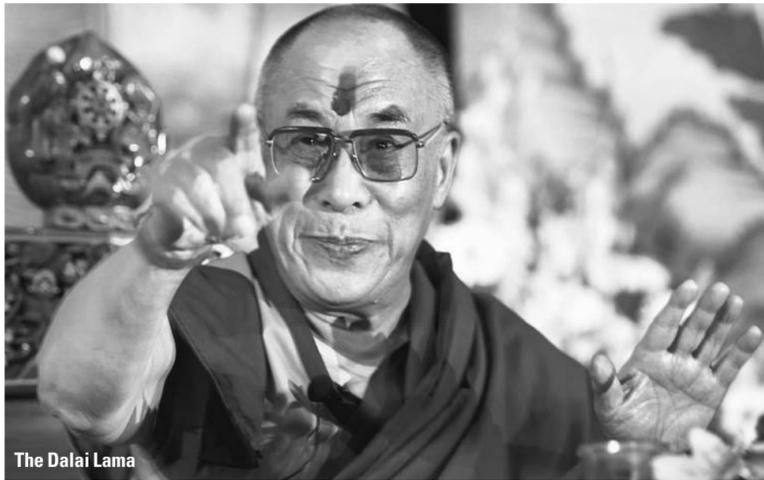
What is this 'people's war'? For many China's watchers, this has been one of the unanswered questions since the Communists came to power in 1949.

It was in the name of the 'people' that Mao started the Great Leap Forward during which more than 30 million perished of starvation; it was 'for the people' that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution left millions of 'people' dead and devastated an entire generation; it is again in the name of the 'people' that war is being today waged against pacifist Tibetan monks.

The People's Liberation Army entered Tibet in October 1950 to 'liberate' the Roof of the World. In March 1959, the entire population of Lhasa rose against the colonisers by assembling around the Summer Palace to protect their leader. Sensing bloodshed, the Dalai Lama escaped at night, heading towards India. A couple of weeks later, he was given refuge by the Indian government. In the repression which followed his departure, thousands were massacred by the People's Army in Lhasa.

A first rapprochement between Beijing and Dharamsala happened in 1979 when Deng Xiaoping met Gyalo Dhondup, the Dalai Lama's brother. He told him that he was ready to discuss everything except Tibet's independence. This meeting was followed by the setting up of four fact-finding delegations.

After twenty years, the Chinese Communist government was under the impression that the 'backward Tibetan people' had finally been liberated. The local Communist authorities briefed the Tibetan population in Lhasa about the forthcoming visit of the Dalai Lama's delegates: "You should not resent this visit. You should not insult the delegates; you should not spit on



The Dalai Lama



Wen Jiabao



Hu Jintao

them, just receive them as your own countrymen," were the strict Party instructions.

They had, however, misread completely the people's feelings, their deep resentment, as well as their will to resist colonisation. The three first delegations visited Tibet between 1979 and 1982; wherever the Dalai Lama's envoys went, they were mobbed by crowds of Tibetans. One delegation member remembers: "The Tibetans tried even to tear our *chubas* (Tibetan dress) to have them as relics." The entire Lhasa population was in the streets; everybody wanting a darshan of the Dalai Lama's envoys.

By the time the fourth and last delegation journeyed to Tibet in 1984, the Communist authorities had learned their lesson. Spies were everywhere, infiltrating crowds: "At first Tibetans came forward to speak to us. But one discovered that some of the Chinese dressed in a Tibetan *chuba*, were spying (on us) with a small walkman in the *chuba* sleeves. People became nervous, they knew they were taped and would be interrogated later. People became more cautious."

Twenty four years later, the surveillance is more sophisticated with video cameras

strategically located all over Lhasa and other big cities. All the mobile phone calls are monitored and it is today rumoured that people who have sent files (pictures or videos) to their relatives in India are being arrested.

During the visit of the 1984 delegation, the 'liberated people' of Tibet had their own way to show their unyielding respect for the Dalai Lama: "Because we were sent by His Holiness (the Dalai Lama), to get something touched by us was (for them) a blessing... when our cars would leave, the Tibetans would collect the soil out of the prints of the tyres of our cars and keep this dust as *prasad* to eat or preserve it."

During the last few days, tens of thousands have taken to the streets knowing fully well that they are being videoed and that they will eventually have to pay for their act of bravery. It shows the state of despair and desperation of the people of Tibet. And Beijing has now decided to wage a 'people's war' against them.

While doing so, the Communist leadership is taking a risk. During the next few months, they were supposed to uphold the spirit of Olympism and respect the traditional, true,

not to wage a war against people, whether they are 'minorities' or not. How will the international community react?

Interestingly, the Communist leaders have not always responded with such brutality. In May 1980, the politburo decided to send a high level fact-finding delegation to the so-called 'Tibet Autonomous Region' (TAR). The delegation was headed by the top Party functionary, Hu Yaobang, who was then the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China. Reaching Lhasa, Hu Yaobang was shocked to see the level of poverty in Tibet. During a meeting with the Party cadres, he asked "whether all the money Beijing had poured into Tibet over the previous years had been thrown into the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river." He said the situation reminded him of colonialism. Hundreds of Chinese Han cadres were transferred back to China.

Unfortunately, this sensible policy did not last long. In 1988, Hu Jintao took over as Tibet Party Chief. In January 1989, the new Tibet boss visited the Tashilhunpo monastery in Shigatse. He was accompanied by the Panchen Lama, the second highest ranking Tibetan Lama after the Dalai Lama. To everyone's surprise, during the function, the Panchen Lama denounced the Communist Party's role in Tibet. "Although there had been developments in Tibet since its liberation, this development had cost more dearly than its achievements. This mistake must never be repeated," he said. Four days later, he passed away in the most mysterious circumstances.

On March 5, when some demonstrations erupted, the People's Armed Police quickly 'took control of the situation'. A Chinese journalist Tang Daxian witnessed some of the events. He later wrote in *The Observer* that on March 6 alone, 387 Tibetans were massacred around the Central Cathedral in Lhasa.

The next day, Hu Jintao declared: "The PAP following the instructions of the Central Committee had maintained the unity of the Motherland... the majority of Tibetans who had joined the disturbance... must be made to feel guilty and promise they would never do so again."

Nineteen years later, the population of Lhasa did it again. Retrospectively, the tragic events of 1989 in Lhasa seem to have been a rehearsal for an even more serious incident: the student rebellion on Tiananmen Square in June.

A few days after the incident Hu Jintao told Xinhua news agency: "We should maintain vigilance against possible activity by the handful of separatists and strike them with relentless blows." His ruthless implementation of his bosses' orders and the subsequent replay of Lhasa events at Tiananmen Square proved he was a leader who could be relied upon.

What is a 'people's war'? It is still not clear to me.