



Cussed China, hopeful Tibet

Saturday July 26, 2008

The Tibetans are back to square one.

After the recent encounter between the Dalai Lama's envoys and Chinese officials, Mr Dong Yunhu, the new director-general of the Information Office of the State Council, declared, "The Central Government will never discuss the future of Tibet with the Dalai Lama. What we can discuss with him is his future and that of some of his supporters."

This was after the last meeting held on July 2 in Beijing. Though termed as the 7th Round (the first Round was held in September 2002), the 'dialogue' between the two parties, which started in 1978-79, is as good as dead.

Way back in 1981, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother was presented a 'Five-Point Policy Towards the Dalai Lama' by Communist Party of China general secretary Hu Yaobang. The essence of it was: "The Dalai Lama will enjoy the same political status and living conditions as he had before 1959. It is suggested that he not go to live in Tibet or hold local posts there. Of course, he may go back to Tibet from time to time. His followers need not worry about their jobs and living conditions. These will only be better than before."

Repeatedly for the past 27 years the Dalai Lama has stated that he is not bothered about his status, but only interested in the welfare of the

six million Tibetans on the 'Roof of the World'. Yet, nearly three decades later, the Chinese are still willing to speak of the Tibetan leader's status only

On his return to Dharamsala, the Chief Envoy, Lodi Gyari, clarified one more time: "Throughout our talks we have reiterated to our counterparts that the issue at hand is the welfare of the Tibetan people and is not about the personal status and affairs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama or that of the Tibetans in exile."

The fact that the Chinese position has not moved an inch during the past three decades is rather disturbing for the Tibetans. It should also be so for India which is trying to sort out its border issue with China. The same delaying tactics (and shifting of the posts) are used in both cases. Basically, whether it concerns the border issue or Tibet, Beijing is quite happy with the *status quo* and can continue like this for decades.

One small sign demonstrates the degree of contempt that Chinese officials have for Tibetans -- they don't even allow the Tibetan delegation to have a Chinese-speaking member, so none in the five-member Tibetan team speaks Chinese. Mr Tsegyam, a Tibetan official fluent in Chinese, had been 'permitted' to attend the 4th round of talks in Berne in June 2005, but the Chinese have now arbitrarily refused permission for him to be included on one pretext or another.

The shy -- or compassionate -- Tibetans had decided not to make it a public issue, though it shows the way the Chinese Han have always treated their vassals. Since the time of Mao Tse-Tung, this attitude has been known as the 'Great Han Chauvinism'.

This time, however, Lodi Gyari had no choice but to state: "In the course of our discussions we were compelled to candidly convey to our counterparts that in the absence of serious and sincere commitment

on their part, the continuation of the present dialogue process would serve no purpose."

Already in May, Lodi Gyari had gone to Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, for informal talks with the same Chinese officials. At that time, *The People's Daily* had scornfully stated, "The meeting, arranged at the repeated requests made by the Dalai side for resuming talks, was held between Central Government officials Zhu Weiqun and Sitar and the Dalai Lama's two private representatives." The Chinese communiqué added: "Zhu and Sitar answered patiently the questions raised by the two representatives."

The Tibetans always seem to be no better off than beggars holding out their bowls for meager alms which are refused anyway. What is more shocking is the constant stream of insults against the 'Dalai and his clique' unleashed by Beijing.

Mr Qin Yizhi, Lhasa party secretary, has stated: "Encouraged by the Olympic spirit of faster, higher, stronger, Lhasa people of all nationalities will... resolutely smash the Dalai clique's scheme to destabilise Tibet." A great understanding of the 'Spirit of the Games', indeed!

His boss and Tibet party chief Zhang Qingli has made it more explicit: "Tibet's sky will never change and the red flag with five stars will forever flutter high above it... We will certainly be able to totally smash the splittist schemes of the Dalai clique." Today even Mr Dong Yunhu of the State Council says: "I don't think (the Dalai Lama) is qualified to represent Tibet."

It is not that the Tibetans have not made all possible efforts. Prof Samdhong Rinpoche, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan Administration in exile in Dharamsala, recently told me that during the sixth round of dialogue held in July 2007, the envoys had requested the People's

Republic of China to have a seventh round of talks in 2007 itself. "In case that was not possible, we wanted it to be held latest by February 2008, otherwise it should be postponed till the end of 2008 or beginning of 2009. We felt that it was not proper to engage the Chinese during the Olympic Year. We knew that they would be busy and the world would have different expectations from China. We thought of keeping a low profile till the Games were completed."

Another issue is the low hierarchical level of the dialogue. In 1954-55, when the Dalai Lama first visited Beijing, he used to have regular formal and informal meetings with Mao Tse-Tung and other senior Communist leaders. When he arrived in the Chinese capital, he was received with great pomp at the railway station by the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and other senior dignitaries.

Later in 1957, when the Tibetan leader came to India for the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha Jayanti, he met the Chinese Premier several times and had in-depth discussions about Tibet and the welfare of his people.

At the end of the 1970s and the 1980s, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, met Deng Xiaoping, then China's 'Leader Maximo', to discuss Tibetan affairs. On the other hand, Lodi Gyari's interlocutors were not senior party leaders and had no decision-making powers.