



## **Tibetan World**

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### **Visit of President Hu Jintao in India**

President Hu Jintao has come and gone. Retrospectively, the Chinese leader's four-day visit can best be described as 'dull'. It was only the Tibetan protests which brought a bit of color to our TV screens or the front pages of newspapers: the monks with their maroon robes, the beautiful aprons of the ladies shouting slogans, the colorful Tibetan national flags or more sadly the immolation attempt by a youngster in Bangalore. The Joint Declaration considered the visit as 'highly successful', but nobody was really fooled.

Despite efforts from both sides, the friendship has not reached the zenith that Indian and Chinese leaders were dreaming of.

Even the 13 Agreements, Protocols and MoUs signed during the State visit brought nothing very new or exciting. Most of them were geared towards closer economic relations (such as opening new Consulates-General at Guangzhou and Kolkata, inspection of iron-ore, better cooperation in the fields of agriculture, education or forestry, improved investment mechanisms, closer collaboration between the Archaeological Survey of India and its Chinese counterpart).

An amusing one was the MOU between the Indian Institute of Public Administration and the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Hu used to be the Director of the school). It states that it *"reflects the desire of the public administration*

*institutions of the two sides to better understand each other's systems of governance and promote cooperation and exchange of experience."*

Indians Communists will probably now be able to understand how a totalitarian regime functions.

The 48 articles of the Joint Declarations run on the same lines.

Basically all controversial issues have been shelved except for the fact that Delhi unnecessarily reiterated that it: *"does not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India."*

Exactly the same formula was used in the Joint Statement after the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit in April 2005. Probably to show the Chinese that it was keeping its words, the Government of India served a notice to the Tibetan activist and poet, Tenzin Tsundue, forbidding him to leave the "territorial jurisdiction of Dharamsala Town". Of course, this restraining order gave the Tibetans much more publicity than if Tsundue had been allowed to proceed to Delhi.

At the same time, demonstrations were not banned in most parts of India, sending the message to the visiting President that India is democracy and freedom of expression is not a vain word.

It has also to be noted that the Kashag did not appeal to the Tibetan population to restrain from demonstrating against the Chinese leader.

In February 2006, Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy had told us: *"We should not spend our energy in the streets; we should get our energies to go inside the government. I am telling people to do things differently, in a more subtle way, in more creative way. We have to show the Chinese that we have become mature. We have learned from the past, we are now an efficient organization, we can make a difference and we can now influence government's policies."*

Does this augur a change of policies in Dharamsala?

Sonam Dagpo, a member of the negotiating team had declared in September: *"Kalon Tripa has already stated that we are ready for the 6<sup>th</sup> round of talks. The question now is, is China ready?"*

After Hu's visit and the coverage received by the Tibetans in the print and electronic media, it will certainly take some time to reestablish the contact with Beijing.

Otherwise for Delhi, engagement in the economic field remains the motto with a new target: to raise the volume of bilateral trade to US \$ 40 billion by 2010. Nothing was discussed (or at least appeared in the Joint Declaration) on more controversial issues.

Before the visit, the Chinese Ambassador Sun Yuxi had shown South Block how to score points when he claimed: *"the whole of what you call the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory and Tawang (district) is only one place in it and we are claiming all of that - that's our position."*

It is a known historical fact that in April 1914, on the side of the Simla Convention, Lochen Shatra for Tibet and Sir Henry McMahon for British India agreed to delineate their common border. Though Ivan Chen, the Chinese plenipotentiary participated in the Conference, he did not object to the famous red line's recognition which did not form part of the Convention (signed in July 1914).

One can regret that Indian diplomacy did not have the boldness to offer its good offices to mediate between the Dalai Lama and Beijing. There would have been nothing unfriendly towards China in this as the Dalai Lama had now dropped his claim for Tibet's independence; Delhi could have offered to facilitate the dialogue between Beijing and Dharamsala in order to find a win-win solution for both. The outcome could be respect for the autonomy of Tibet as promised in the Chinese

Constitution and fulfillment of the aspirations of the Tibetan people for a 'genuine' solution.

It is also disappointing that South Block did not take the unique opportunity of the Presidential State visit to request for negotiations on the following points:

- The reopening of the Karakoram Pass and the ancient trade route to Yarkand and Kashmir. Traditionally the business between the State of Jammu and Kashmir and Central Asia has flourished and even today, many in the region remember with nostalgia the caravans taking Indian goods to Xinjiang and further on the Silk Road and bringing back goods to the subcontinent.
- The reopening of an Indian Consulate General in Kashgar.
- The opening of the Ladakh route through Demchok for Indian pilgrims wanting to visit Mount Kailash. This will be much quicker and less hazardous than the UP road.
- The signature of a Water Treaty for rivers originating in Tibet and flowing to India in line with the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan. The rumoured damming and diversion of the Brahmaputra is a cause for anguish for millions in South Asia.

To be fair, it appears that Delhi did take up the matter of the reopening an Indian Consulate General in Lhasa (which existed till the 1962 war and Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon's father was one of the last Indian officers to occupy the post). Three places were discussed: Lhasa, Chengdu and Guangzhou. China agreed to Guangzhou only, while India accepted to have a Chinese consulate in Kolkata.

About Lhasa, the Chinese gave a lame answer to Delhi: they do not allow any country to have a consulate there. First it is not true,

because Nepal has one, and given that Beijing and Delhi have resumed trade between India and Tibet through the Nathu-la in July, it seemed logical that Consulates located in Lhasa and Kolkata would deal with an increasing traffic.

The Indian Express wrote: *"The understanding in South Block was that having a consulate in Lhasa will help develop people-to-people contact besides giving an impetus to cross-border trade. But Beijing still seems to be not that comfortable when it comes to access to Tibet Autonomous Region."*

The opening of the Lhasa consulate would have proved that China was keen to turn a page of their history. It is not so: it further shows the limits of the Friendship between India and China.

More and more it becomes obvious that unless the Tibetan issue is looked into and a reasonable solution is found for the Tibetan people, the flower of eternal friendship will not be able to bloom between the Dragon and the Elephant. The Snow Lion lies in between them.