



Seek the truth from the facts

June, 8, 2004

Was it a mere coincidence? The day the new Government assumed power in Delhi, Beijing issued a White Paper, "Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet". This is not the first time that Beijing has tried to convince its detractors of the good the Chinese regime has brought to the Tibetans.

The new White Paper comes at a critical time for the future of the Dalai Lama's people and for Beijing; it coincides with the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. For India, it is certainly intended to convince the new Government (and its communist allies) that everything is fine on the Tibetan plateau and that its people who once "lived in serfdom" now prosper in peace, fully in charge of their own destiny.

It is also an answer to the Dalai Lama's administration which seeks to open a dialogue with the Chinese leadership but has still not been able to convince Beijing of the need to negotiate for what the Tibetan leader calls "a genuine autonomy" for Tibet. The comments are even more startling when one reads the White Paper which endeavours to prove that today the people of Tibet enjoy full democratic rights. To quote: *"In the nearly 40 years since Tibet adopted regional ethnic autonomy, it has turned from an extremely backward feudal serfdom into a modern socialist people's democracy."*

Deng Xiaoping used to advise his people to "seek the truth from the facts". It is a good advice. Reading the White Paper, it is clear that one fact is not taken into consideration by the Chinese State Council: It is what the King of Bhutan calls the GNH or Gross National Happiness. If thousands of Tibetans still flee their homeland every year at the risk of their lives, enduring unbelievable hardships while crossing the Himalayas, it is evident that everything is not "shining" at the "happiness level" in Tibet. Second, something which has personally disturbed me a great deal is the outbreak of prostitution in Tibet. When girls have no other prospect but to sell their bodies, is it possible to speak of the people being "masters of their own destiny"?

A recent report from Kathmandu disclosed: *"Chinese police and local authorities in Tibet near the Nepal border are colluding with local Tibetan and Chinese entrepreneurs in recruiting Tibetan girls and women to work as escorts, barmaids, and prostitutes."*

A few more facts can be mentioned which belie the truth of the White Paper.

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, a Tibetan Lama who recently passed away, was the founder of the Serthar Buddhist Institute in Kardze (Sichuan Province). In the 1980s, his institute became the largest religious concentration on Tibetan plateau with some 7,000 monks and nuns. Significantly, hundreds of students from China joined this institute, demonstrating the increased interest in Tibetan Buddhist teachings in Chinese society. For many years the institute was spared the dreadful "patriotic education" campaigns, thanks to Khenpo Phuntsog's harmonious relations with the provincial local authorities. However, due to the large number of Chinese disciples, the institute was closed by the authorities in 2001 and most of its buildings were razed. Chinese students had to return to China.

Another case is of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, a senior lama from Lithang (also in Sichuan province) who was sentenced to death by the Intermediate People's Court in Kartse in December, 2003. Without proper and open trial, Deleg was accused of "causing explosions and inciting separatism". His sentence was linked to a bomb explosion in Chengdu in April 2002.

The problem was Deleg was an embarrassment to the Chinese since the 1990s, when he supported local people in the reconstruction of various small monasteries. The Chinese local leaders could not stomach his popularity with the Tibetans. Many more cases could be cited, the latest being the change of policies for Hong Kong. The standing committee of the National People's Congress ruled out universal suffrage in the elections for the Hong Kong chief executive in 2007 and for all members of the legislature in 2008. This decision goes against the earlier promise made by Beijing.

For Beijing, the White Paper is considered a masterstroke, killing several birds with one stone. It tackles with an array of statistics the Dalai Lama's demand for "genuine autonomy", leaving him very little room to bargain during future negotiations; it provides ammunition to the Indian communists to prove that their comrades in Beijing have always been sincere by providing "autonomy" to ethnic minorities since they "liberated" Tibet; it

gives Beijing sufficient time to change the demography of Tibet by bringing in millions of Han Chinese to the Roof of the World and to complete the railway track to Lhasa which can transport missiles a step closer to Indian border; indirectly and finally, it answers Beijing's critics of the Tiananmen massacre.

The new occupants of South Block may be tempted to follow in Nehru's footsteps but before jumping into a new love affair with Beijing, it would be wise for them to seek the truth from the facts. Will they have the courage to go above ideologies and adopt Deng's words as their motto?