

CHINA AND REALITY

Reality can be inconvenient. And for the policymakers in New Delhi's foreign affairs department, the Chinese reality shows a tendency to get in the way when they are simply busy with the himalayan illusion. As New Delhi was preparing to greet Chinese President Hu Jintao and his entourage the Chinese envoy in India literally dropped a bombshell by stating in no uncertain terms that Arunachal Pradesh was an integral part of China. It was one way to tell the world that despite too much euphoria generated over Hu's visit there was not much to cheer about.

The border dispute that produced a war in 1962 has acquired new dimensions because of China's soft diplomacy over the years. Even in 1962 Beijing was more interested in Kashmir sector, not NEFA or what is now called Arunachal. One reason China did not make the border issue in recent years a point of no return is the effective control the Chinese forces exercise over the 'disputed territories'. In truth China has not budged an inch from its stated stand on the India-China boundary question. Hu's current visit was in the main aimed at forcefully reiterating the Chinese position on a comprehensive deal, border being the top priority, which seems impossible unless India ratifies its unanimous parliamentary resolution on India-China border war, notwithstanding ceremonial signing of 13 or so bilateral pacts in Hu's Delhi mission. There is a cautious pathway that the Chinese take, and it's been hard to break that. Till recently India and China were pursuing multi-lateral trade liberalisation under the auspices of WTO. It is unlikely that Hu's friendship diplomacy would pave the way for New Delhi and Beijing looking for regional trade pact, rather free trade agreement. Improved bilateral relations depend on amicable solution of the himalayan border dispute left by history. Joint communique cannot reach the himalayan altitudes. Unless both sides agree not to disagree on a formula of 'give and take' it is next to impossible to break the stalemate on the border issue. When China recognised India's suzerainty over Sikkim, it was interpreted in the concerned circles as Beijing's signal to say 'goodbye' to NEFA or Arunachal. No, things did not move in that direction. Maybe, China is pressurising India over Arunachal as a bargaining ploy to have its western sector legitimised as Pakistan has already conceded some areas of occupied Kashmir to China in a bilateral agreement.

Meanwhile, Tibetans in exile had a tough time to make their presence felt. New Delhi's security forces made elaborate arrangement not to embarrass President Hu by not allowing even peaceful demonstrations by the Tibetans and their friends in India. Today Tibetans living in India are a forgotten people. But it is one thing to accept Tibet as part of China, and it is quite another to subtly support the Dalai Lama's government in exile to pursue the cause of Tibet. It's a tragedy that the Tibetans never got any official support from any corner of the globe though they have a genuine case to worry about—the Han domination over the Tibetan life and culture.

It's also a grand tragedy that nobody recognises Tibet's independent history. The Tibetan rulers had all along enjoyed a kind of semi-independent status before the army of Mao's China marched into that hapless country ostensibly to liberate the Tibetan people from age-old serf-dom otherwise symbolised by the Dalai Lama. Ever since the complete subjugation of Tibet in the late 1940s the Beijing authorities have been systematically destroying Tibetan identity by way of demographic manipulation and realigning the border regions of old Tibet with mainland Chinese provinces. What stands today as Autonomous Tibetan Region is regarded by many as a tiny fraction of original Tibetan landmass. Tibetans are a minority community in their own country and, it is no less than an ethnic cleansing through "peaceful" means.

India's desire to co-operate with China in civilian nuclear sector is in reality an offer to buy Chinese reactors while implying the weak message that the Hus should not destroy nuclear parity in South Asia by granting extra privileges to Pakistan, the possibility of which seems quite likely.

Whether celebrating India-China friendship in the wake of Hu's not so historic visit makes any difference in the stand off is open to question. After all the spirit of *panchasheel* is not in sight. Interestingly India-China Friendship Societies were conspicuous by their silence. What role they play in improving India-China bilateral ties is anybody's guess. ~~del del del~~