

Subject: CHANGING CHINA - FORMING THE AUTHENTIC INDIAN PERCEPTION

0. The changes that have occurred in China since Mao's death, and which have been accelerated in the past few years since the rise of "Dengism", have been described and commented upon quite extensively in the foreign (mostly Western) media and in Western scholarly journals. The Indian opinion-forming, opinion-making audience and the press has imbibed this and many of our perceptions of China are heavily conditioned by what we have imbibed this way at second-hand. Except what our Embassy in Beijing has been sending us, the "direct experience" of China has not found much place in policy evolution.

1. However, in the past five years, a large number of Indians have visited China as members of many official, and some non-official, delegations. At first guess this number must have crossed 200 by now. (I have been unable to get a figure from the Ministry of External Affairs on the informal net). The reports of these teams/groups/individuals are not all available in one place. It is doubtful if all the reports by the delegations/teams/individuals that are available have been read by a single team of analysts to discern any patterns, and distill it into an "Indian View" of China. Besides, the written reports do not contain the full flavour of the perceptions which are articulated in speech, and the many observations of individual members of teams/delegations about matters not connected with the official purpose of the visits.

2. Many Indians working in international agencies (UN and its agencies, Asian Development Bank, etc.) have also visited China in recent years, and their impressions/perceptions are also potentially available, but remain unutilised.

3. If our relationship with China is to be an India-Centered one, then our perceptions of China should, in good measure, derive directly from the first-hand knowledge and experience of Indians who have visited that country and interacted directly with its people at various levels - street encounters; informal contact; group discussions; scholarly and scientific meeting participation; formal commercial negotiations; diplomatic meetings; etc. Given further that we are not a homogenous society, the perception/reactions of different Indian groups to the same Chinese "object" will be different. The contradictions of our society will bounce off, so to speak, the contradictions of China's Society. We must comprehend this mosaic of perceptions to get an India-centered view of China - the "Indian mosaic" of China. It is only then that our policies towards China will be broad-based "Indian" policies - as distinct from policies which are derivatively influenced by other country's perceptions of China.

4. What we could do to start an on-going process of building the Indian mosaic of China is to get together some dozen key people - from within the Government and without - into a Steering Group headed by MEA to structure an agenda for an in-depth series of Seminars covering the following with an emphasis on getting a feel for the real, on-ground, Chinese policies, as distinct from the formally stated ones:

✍ Agricultural policies

✍ Industrial Policies

✍ Economic & Financial management policies

✍ Health, Nutrition, Education and Social Welfare (including population control) policies

✍ Policies relating directly to Chinese National Security

✍ Science & Technology and its real place in each of the above.

The specific topics under each of the above should be chosen by the Steering Group after an analysis is made by the Steering Group of the data on the individuals, affiliations and purposes of the visits made by Indians to China. These data must be starting point and must

first be collected, as also a complete set of reports made by official delegations and visits to China in the past five years (from MEA and RAW).

5. It bears repetition to emphasise that the Seminar must reveal the ensemble of what was actually observed, discussed and obtained at first hand from China. A special effort will need to be made to dissuade participants from "showing-off" their "knowledge" of China obtained from other sources.