



Assessing the Anti-Corruption Campaign: Report on a Forum in Beijing

Speaker: Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, Honorary Fellow, ICS

Chair: Prof. Sreemati Chakrabarti, Honorary Fellow and Vice Chairperson, ICS

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Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, had attended the “Party and the World” Conference from 8 -12 September 2015 in Beijing. The conference was sponsored by China’s Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCWS) and the International Cooperation Department of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the CPC. Mohanty shared some of the details about the conference while ably contextualizing contemporary developments in Chinese politics, such as the anti-corruption campaign. Below is a report of the presentation.

The central theme of the conference was ‘Disciplining the Party: the Responsibility of the Party’, which is also one of the principles of the ‘Four Comprehensives’. The ‘Four Comprehensives’ is the new political theory put forward by Xi and offers guidelines for his concept of ‘national rejuvenation’. They are:

1. Comprehensively achieving well-off society in all respects viz. economic, political, social, cultural and ecological
2. Comprehensively deepening reforms
3. Advancing law based governance
4. Governing the party strictly

The Conference professed to be an effort to initiate dialogue among various think tanks and political leaders of the world to seek solutions to the universal problem of corruption, to enhance state governance and perhaps, also to build a global corruption prevention network.

The ‘Four Comprehensives’ in the view of the speaker seems to have succeeded to some extent given that presently the Party is in command explicitly. The speaker added that this had not been the case with the earlier regimes primarily because Deng Xiaoping believed that everything should not be controlled by the Party (Dang Zhengzhi Qiye Fenpian), which is why in the 1980s, even though the Party was politically in control, the economic construction was directly initiated by the enterprise managers and bureaucrats. The pattern continued during Jiang Zemin’s period. Hu Jintao initiated transition to this pattern but it was Xi Jinping who made it absolutely clear that China is a one-party state with the Communist Party in charge. Quoting Wang Qishan, the speaker stated that the ‘anti-corruption campaign’ is not a power struggle as understood by many, but holds a larger significance

with regard to governance related reforms. Therefore, in his view, the conference was more of an experience-sharing initiative by the party to learn from its global counterparts. Further, although Xi Jinping continued with what was started by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, he has been able to take the ‘anti-corruption campaign’ to a strategic level by introducing institutional restructuring, changes in conduct rules and by routinizing trial and punishment. Moreover, the ‘anti-corruption campaign’ is being coordinated by the most important institution or leader after Xi Jinping – Wang Qishan a Politburo Standing Committee member is the Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI).

The speaker explained that even though Xi’s government handled the issue strategically and the 18th Political Report identified the roots of the problem within the political economy of the state, it is still limited to being a governance issue. He further argued that although the anti-corruption campaign is part of the unfolding of the Four Comprehensives, it does not seem comprehensive enough.

The speaker shared aspects of the plenary report that he had presented at the Conference as recommendations from the group that he was part of:

1. The political economy of corruption should be tackled by a combination of regulation and freedom. There should be transparency with respect to rules.
2. There should be strong laws along with independent investigation and implementation machinery.
3. A moral basis for obligation towards following rules and to not commit improper acts.

Other important recommendations that came up during the Conference were:

1. Establishment of an Ombudsman at every level and every institution.
2. Institutional reforms such as transparency with regard to the expenditure of the Public Money.

According to the speaker, the highlight of the Conference was the visit to the newly setup website building of the CCDI. It was a multi-storey building with a well-planned complaint and grievance redressal mechanism. They also had laws for the protection of whistle-blowers and every province had a separate provincial office of CCDI. The Central website was open to all and received nearly a million complaints every day.

The other highlight of the Conference was the visit to Haidian District Court where a trial was being conducted. An agent of the provincial government was being tried for bribing the NDRC bureau chief authorized to give clearance for the setup of a new power plant in the province.

The speaker concluded his presentation by saying that although the four comprehensives seem to have unfolded on several fronts like the Belt and Road Initiative and 13th Five Year Plan, however, the government has fallen into a ‘success trap’. In his view, even Hu Jintao had failed to break free from the trap wherein, even though the country was growing economically, it encountered a series of social, economic and political dilemmas. The speaker also shared a part of Wang Qishan’s address to the delegates: According to Wang, corruption was major bane as it hampered the various measures put in place to tackle more endemic problems pertaining to inequality, regional disparity, environmental degradation and so on. Therefore, Wang called upon the delegates and the world to recognise the anti-corruption campaign as an effort to tackle the above problems.

Discussion

The discussion that followed the talk centred on the efficiency of the steps being followed by the CCDI with attempts to undertake a broad comparison with India's own efforts at fighting corruption. The speaker argued that corruption could be contained through decentralization of power and by allowing masses to participate in decision-making and policy-making at the grassroots level. One of the important measures that the Chinese have adopted in order to curb corruption is the 'zero tolerance measure' which mandates punishment of one's own family member in corruption cases. Other important questions raised during the discussion are: how does the Chinese state define corruption? Given, the way in which the campaign is being played out, does it signal the re-emergence of a party state or a changed equation between the state and the party?

The speaker responded thus: Corruption is a global problem and nations have to work on three fronts, namely, the socio-economic basis of corruption, the law and implementation mechanism and the moral values of the society. He opined that it is a continuous process and there is no 'Scandinavian magic formula' to tackle the problem. It is a wider phenomenon that needs a multi-pronged approach.

About the Speaker

Manoranjan Mohanty is a teacher, researcher and writer. A Political Scientist, distinguished China Scholar and Peace and Human Rights activist, he has many books and research papers on theoretical and empirical dimensions of social movements, human rights, development studies and global transformation. After retiring from University of Delhi he has been with the Council for Social Development (CSD) and is the Editor of the CSD Journal, Social Change published by Sage. He is an Honorary Fellow, and formerly Chairperson, of Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi. He is also Chairperson, Development Research Institute, Bhubaneswar, and Fellow at Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, UC, Santa Barbara.

Report was prepared by Jaya Kumari, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.

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