



## **China's Stance on Recent Developments in Arunachal Pradesh**

**Speakers:** Dr Hemant Adlakha, Ms Suhasini Haidar, Dr Tshering Chonzom Bhutia

**Chair:** Mr. Ashok K Kantha

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Considering the recent development in India China ties especially as an aftermath of Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal; the seminar intended to address some of the major related issues. Relatively, this time China's resentment was seen as more strident. The Chinese media remain at the forefront with respect to the latest spat. With this premise, speakers explored and assessed the recent Chinese reaction and its implication on the trajectory of India-China relations.

The first speaker, Dr. Tshering C. Bhutia spoke on the recent development and its linkages with Tibet issue. The interlinkages between 'two issue areas', Tibet and Tawang, from the border perspective can be the possible factor. However, she argued that Tibet which has been a major irritant for China is at the core of recent spat. She spoke about the changing nomenclature of places in Arunachal Pradesh and its implications. She particularly affirmed on the timing of the renaming of these places in Arunachal which is just six days prior to Dalai's Lama's visit to the place. Transcription of names of these places in Chinese pinyin was exercised primarily to leverage China's negotiation on the border issue. However, the release of geographical co-ordinates of these six names by MEA which is rather incorrect contradicts with what Chinese describes as their "core interest", she argued.

Dr. Hemant Adlakha, the second speaker, highlighted on the narratives of Chinese media and scholars that were built over a month. He was of the opinion that the matter is just a month

old and to arrive at any conclusion is too early. The linkages that have been drawn between name changing process and Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal also does not contain any serious implications. In Chinese discourse such Indian interpretation has been described as naïve. Names of these places in Chinese vocabulary are described as 'supplementary' or 'additional' rather than change as such. The speaker also presented maps to highlight how Tibet was understood and represented in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasty. He argued that as these representations started evolving, the name of Tibet in Chinese has also evolved.

However, it was understood that among the Chinese scholarly arena the stance towards border issue is strong and possibility of that translating into bilateral relations is immense. One of the scholars from Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS), suggested changing of existing names into traditional especially in Tibetan areas. Out of 27 names that he had suggested six has already been announced and the remaining might come soon. Further, the Chinese approach towards other places such as Ladakh, Kashmir and some of the BCIM area may also toughen.

On China's overall posturing on 'Zangnan' or south Tibet based on some articles the speaker argued, China was encouraged to use the term as because the debate was much prevalent in India rather than in China. Zangnan as south Tibet was never mentioned in any of the Chinese diplomat's vocabulary before 2003. Much of the Chinese reference is found only post 2009 and 2013. In India it was believed that Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit provided a pretext to employ this term but it was the recognition of TAR by India that promoted it. At present, the Chinese toughening of its strength at South Tibet and India's increasing military presence is going in parallel in this region. Speaker pointed out that, the thorough knowledge of Tibet and its background is scarce among the general populace in China. Scholars do not focus much on Sino-Indian border disputes as well. The common agreement on the length of border also varies.

Meaning of the sentence in Chinese is determined by the order of the word rather the word itself and China's geo-political strategy operates in the same principal. He ended the talk by arguing that when 'China puts emphasis on stability it should not be misread as immobility'.

The third speaker, Ms. Suhasini Haidar highlighting on the experiences that she had gathered over the years as a journalist suggested what should be the future parameters for India-China engagements. She argued that the Chinese reaction did not occur in a political vacuum. According to her India's engagement with China rests on 'three and a half fronts'. This front

essentially includes boundary issue, neighbourhood issue – Pakistan, maritime issue and half front is Tibet.

On recent Chinese remarks she argued that it is not much different than Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Arunachal just a month before Dalai Lama's visit in November 2009. The main factor that resulted into the recent Chinese resentment is, first the timing especially with reference to OBOR. Second, due to the fact that he was accompanied by elected officials and the visit was preceded by US Ambassador.

Apart from this what is transpiring within China, has a major role to play. China's view on Tibet has evolved over the years. The confidence that they have garnered on Tibet is remarkable and it is not only a major irritant and stability concern. Comparing her two visits to Tibet over the years the speaker concluded that China has reduced coercive control over Tibet. It included reduction in the number of incidents, Han Chinese are almost settled in the region and the sealing of frontiers of Tibet with the help of Nepal. Most importantly, it is the infrastructure which leads Chinese to be confident with regard to Tibet.

The middle power coalition which other countries such as Australia, America and Japan etc., want to create appears as a front against China. The increasing involvement of India and third party voices is something China is eager to hear.

She concluded by saying, with regard to Tibet and dealing with China, the Dalai Lama's succession should be the first imperative of India and it should not be used as a pawn or 'Tibet card'. Second, in order to give the community recognition in India, survey should be conducted to know what Tibetans actually want. Lastly, infrastructure along the border should be given needed attention.

Discussant, Gautam Das argued that the Chinese reaction is a part of process that has occurred many a times. The discussant disagreed with what last speaker mentioned as 'Tibet card' which Indian government has been using. Coming to first speaker's point on the 'ineptitude' of Chinese vis -a- vis changing of nomenclature in Arunachal, the discussant argued it's not the ineptitude and casualness of Chinese. The geographical co-ordinates that the Chinese have given is deliberate, and certainly more will come in future.

*Report prepared by Diki Sherpa, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

## **About the Speakers:**

### **Speaker 1**

Dr. Tshering Chonzom Bhutia is an Associate Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies. She has a PhD from the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. Her thesis was titled ‘Applying Negotiation Theory to the Sino-Tibetan Talks, 1979-2006’. Currently, she is heading a research project that seeks to compare the Indian and Chinese government’s ethnic minority policies. She has a varied work experience including research, editing and programme coordination with organisations such as the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

### **Speaker 2**

Dr. Hemant Adlakha is Associate Professor and Chairperson, Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He is also Honorary Fellow, the Institute for Chinese Studies, Delhi. His research on China includes domestic political discourse, foreign policy, language and literature, and cinema. His areas of interest include political culture and civil society discourse in China, state and society in Chinese political theory, political and economic history of modern China.

### **Speaker 3**

Ms. Suhasini Haidar is the Diplomatic Editor of The Hindu, one of India’s oldest and most respected national dailies. Prior to this, Suhasini was Foreign Affairs editor and prime time anchor for India’s leading 24-hr English news channel CNN-IBN (2005-2014), where she presented the signature show “WorldView with Suhasini Haidar”, and Correspondent for CNN International’s New Delhi bureau before that. In 2015, she was the recipient of the most prestigious Indian print journalism ‘Prem Bhatia’ award, and has won a series of awards for her work in Television as well. Over the course of her 20-year reporting career, Suhasini has covered the most challenging stories & conflicts

## **About the Discussant**

Col Gautam Das is an Adjunct Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies. He has been fascinated by many aspects of Chinese culture since an early exposure in the Kolkata of the early 1950s. He was practically involved with the Sino-Indian border issue while an Army officer in the period 1968-1991, during which he had both ground exposure as well as General Staff exposure to the Sino-Indian border issue. His interests include Chinese art (painting and three-dimensional), Chinese cuisine, and the Chinese martial arts. He is also interested in Mongolian history and Mongolian horsemanship. He is the author of several books on military matters – military history, Sino-Indian border issues and the border war of 1962, defence policy, and counter-insurgency policy for North-East India.

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