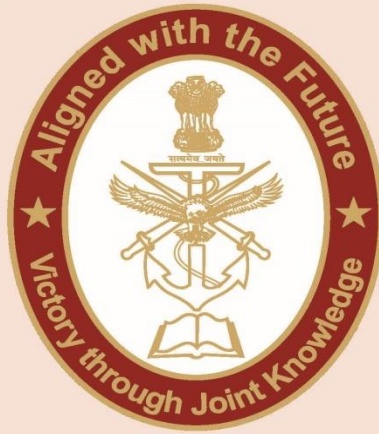


# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

### CHINESE EXPLOITATION OF TIBET



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A New York-based human rights group states that millions of Tibetans have been forced to leave their homes and livelihoods as part of a mass government relocation programs aimed to control the ethnic group. Reports of Sept stated that Chinese authorities forced Tibetan farmers and herders into labour programmes similar to that in Xinjiang. They added that more than ‘500,000 rural labourers — mainly herders and subsistence farmers — were trained in the first seven months of 2020.’

Chinese government officials claim that these training schemes aim to instil ‘work discipline, Chinese language and work ethics.’ Further, Chinese claims of this being in tune with Xi Jinping’s plans to eradicate poverty has been disputed by Jamestown Foundation, which states that this is a ‘form of ideological indoctrination and assimilation towards ethnic Tibetans, who make up 90% of the remote border region’s population.’

The Chinese government denies forced evictions, insisting the relocations are entirely voluntary and that Tibetans are grateful for the new housing. On the contrary, Human Rights Watch states that large numbers of those relocated did not move voluntarily. It adds many were forced into sub-

standard housing and currently face financial difficulties as a result of forced relocation. There are also inputs that China has used the coronavirus to deepen its control over the private and devotional lives of Tibetans.

Reports add that each constructed house has a photograph of Xi Jinping and the region is flooded with Chinese flags. Tibetans are banned from displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama and their own traditional religious flags. Evidently an attempt to change culture and religious beliefs is underway.

In end August, Xi Jinping chaired a major meeting on Tibet, subject of which was 'Sinicization of Tibet.' Prior to this meeting senior party officials visited Tibet to convey that Tibet is next in line after Xinjiang for mass conversions and suppression of religious beliefs. In the meeting Xi gave a few guidelines. The officials were directed to make the communist party the only religion in Tibet and were to crush any dissent.

Measures announced included faster relocating locals from their traditional areas to reconstructed accommodation on a 'voluntary basis,' as also their re-education. The final aim was to strengthen border defence and frontier security by moving Tibetans to constructed housing close to the borders. However, these actions are nothing new and have been ongoing for a prolonged time. The fact that they were restated by the undisputed Chinese King, Xi Jinping, implied they have to be implemented forcefully.

This approach was earlier described by Claude Arpi as, 'Govern the nation by governing the borders; govern the borders by first stabilizing Tibet; ensure social harmony and stability in Tibet and strengthen the development of border regions.' With directions from the King, the local government has gone overboard in construction of model villages (termed as Xiaokang villages). Across Arunachal, where the population is sparse, a number of such villages, each accommodating 600 to 1000 individuals are mushrooming.

As per multiple international agencies, with almost no volunteers, China is forcibly pushing Tibetans from farfetched mineral rich regions into these

villages. Officially, it is seeking to change the demography of border regions, however, the reality is different. The main intention is to gain control of the mineral rich regions, currently occupied by Tibetan herders, where the Han Chinese would be relocated and encouraged to exploit. Most Tibetan villages located close to the border also have military barracks to house troops ensuring the re-education and forcible conversions of Tibetans is closely monitored by the PLA.

By this process, China has intruded into private lives of Tibetans, begun their close monitoring, eroding their culture and religious belief while pushing the communist agenda. Tibetans, who regularly visited Holy Cave and Holy Water regions at the Indian Tulum Pass have been prevented from doing so in recent times. In a WMCC (Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China border issues) meeting, China refused to permit Tibetans from visiting these areas.

In most regions of Tibet, apart from Lhasa, there remains a low percentage of Han Chinese. However, as per details, 70% of lucrative and influential posts in local governments are with them. Adrian Zenz, a researcher at the U.S.-based Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation stated that Beijing's current minority policy is likely to lead to a long-term loss of linguistic, cultural and spiritual heritage.

Tibetan areas of China have been hit by a wave of self-immolation protests. Since 2009, over 120 Tibetans have set themselves ablaze to protest what they see as Chinese repression of their religion and culture. Many of the self-immolators have also called for the return of the Dalai Lama. Chinese leadership, on the other hand, remains fearful of the power of the Dalai Lama to influence local minds.

The Chinese intention appears to be to move Tibetans close to the borders, while filling the main towns and mineral rich areas with Han Chinese. Thus, in case of a conflict, Tibetans may be employed as a shield or even a deterrent for the Special Frontier Force (SFF), while the Han Chinese remain secure. While the Chinese may attempt to forcibly convert and suppress the Tibetans, the impact may be the opposite. Outwardly, the

Tibetans may appear suppressed, internally there is rising anger against the Chinese, though latent.

The Chinese interest in Tibet is also economic. Tibet has natural resources that China needs; over 30 percent of the country's hydro-electric power comes from Tibet. Additionally, China is the world's largest producer of copper, and a sixth of it comes from Tibet. Tibetans are in the way of Chinese development and control over resources just like the Uighurs are in the way in Xinjiang. China is forcefully suppressing both regions also for economic resources, apart from spreading the communist ideology.

In the current tense standoff between India and China in Ladakh, the presence of the SFF, comprising of wards of Tibetan migrants conveys the determination of Tibetans to counter Chinese aggression. Their involvement in future operations may encourage a popular uprising within the region, which could be detrimental to Chinese interests. This may manifest itself more in the border regions, where the Tibetans are being relocated. The more Chinese suppress religious and cultural beliefs, the more latent anger remains. It is this which would be exploited, in case of an Indo-China conflict.

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