

# Fifty years of revolution

## A peep through the Great Wall

Only time can tell whether Deng's reforms would eventually take China to the main road of capitalism. But at this point of time, two decades after the ruling CPC had adopted economic reform policies in the late 1970s, one can safely say that, as far as economic development is concerned, Deng's cat has delivered, writes **Nurul Kabir** after attending the golden jubilee celebrations of the People's Republic of China in Beijing

WHEN Deng Xiaoping's Communist Party of China (CPC) announced its policy of reforms and opening of the country's economy to the outside world at the end of 1978, the orthodox communists across the globe found a clear 'rightist' deviation in the party leadership. Apprehensive of an eventual defeat of the Chinese socialism, many of them — especially those who drew inspiration for socialist revolutions in their respective countries from Mao Zedong's success in 1949 — underwent an intellectual agony. Deng was branded by them, as he was by Mao Zedong a few years back, a 'capitalist road'.

Perhaps Deng was aware of the phenomenon. He told his people, as well as China's well-wishers abroad: *It does not matter whether the cat is black or white so long it can catch the rats.* And he shifted focus to modernisation centring on the country's national economy.

Only time can tell whether Deng's reforms would eventually take China to the main road of capitalism. But at the moment, two decades after the ruling CPC had adopted economic reform policies, one can safely observe: as far as economic developments are concerned, Deng's cat is capable of catching the rats.

From 1979 to 1997, China's average rate of annual Gross Domestic Product came to 9.8 per cent, while its overall economic strength ranked seventh in the world. Output of several major industrial and agricultural products rank first in the world items in absolute figures. These products include grain, cotton, meat, oil-bearing crops, coal, steel, cement, cloth and TV sets. In addition, production of chemical fibre, wool fabric, non-ferrous metals, generated energy, oil, chemical fertilisers and sugar are among world leaders.

Statistics show that the Gross National Products (GNP) in 1952 was 67.9 billion yuan. But the figure rose to 7955.3 billion or 7.9 trillion yuan in 1988 — 29 times higher than that of 1952. On another count, 12 days of present China's GNP is equivalent to that of the whole of 1952.

To give recent figures, over the period between 1992 and 1996 when many developed countries witnessed decline in their growth rate, China's GDP rose by 12.1 per cent a year on average.

Its forex reserve last year was only second to that of the United States. Such rapid economic growth, inflation was brought under effective control, and thus drastic fluctuations were avoided.

The living standards of the people rose remarkably. Average annual per capita income for living expenses increased by 7.2 per cent for city-dwellers in real terms, while average annual per capita net income went up by 5.7 percent for rural residents.

Savings deposits of urban and rural residents rose considerably. The rural poor population of the country decreased by 32 million. Along with such a phenomenal economic success, China has earned tremendous achievement in social service sectors like education, health-care and living.

To talk about an overall literacy rate, one is forced to remember that 80 per cent of China's people were illiterate when the CPC founded People's Republic of China in 1949. But in 1997, 98.9 per cent of the children were attending schools. In the year there were 139.95 million students enrolled in 629,000 primary schools, while 93.7 per cent of primary school graduates continued their education.

China is focusing its energy on carrying out what it calls '211 Project', effectively engineering and cultivating 100 major universities and an extensive group of important academic disciplines with an eye turn to the 21st century. As many as 349,600 students have received Masters degree and 27,500 doctorates since 1980. Graduate programmes offering masters and doctorate degrees have been established in most of the disciplines. In 1997, China had 180,000 college graduates pursuing advanced degrees.

metres. About 3.29 billion square metres of new apartment buildings were built in cities and towns. Average living space for every urban citizen has increased from 3.6 square metres in 1978 to 8.7 in 1997.

On the other hand, in 1997, some 87.7 million urban labourers were covered by old-age insurance, more than 24.5 million pensioners by the programme for pooling retirement pensions, 13 million labourers by the pooling medical care programme for serious illness and over 1.03 million retired people by the programme for pooling medical treatment fees. The labour and insurance organisations all over the country provided relief to over 3.8 million unemployed labourers.

Workers and staff who are old, sick, injured or handicapped receive material assistance from the state. For example, retired workers and staff receive pensions equivalent to 75-100 per cent of their wages, depending on their service length. They also enjoy the same medical insurance as the serving workers and staff do.

There are 1.03 million beds in homes for the elderly and orphans serving 790,000 people.

### Not an isolated incident

Unlike post-Stalin 'communists' of the former Soviet Union, the present-day Chinese leadership seem aware of the invaluable contributions of the political forces led by Mao Zedong made towards the country's social, political and economic advancements of the day. The Chinese even respectfully recognise the contributions of Dr. Sun Yat-sen who led the 1911 democratic revolution that overthrew the autocratic monarchy-reigning in China for thousands of years and initiated the first historic changes in the country's socio-political formation.

It is true that the 1911 Revolution failed to change the social nature of old China and emancipate people from their socio-economic hardship, but it opened the sluice-gates for progress in China and made it impossible for the reactionary rule to remain stable any longer.

Official documents of the CPC still admits that the second historic change was 'marked by the founding of the People's Republic of China and the establishment of the socialist system. This was accomplished after the founding of the Communist Party of China and under the direction of the first generation of collective leadership with Mao Zedong at the core'.

In his report placed at the 15th national congress of CPC in September 1997, President Jiang Zemin admits: 'Proceeding from New Democracy, we took the road to socialism and scored tremendous achievements in socialist construction. This was a great victory of the people's revolution which had never been recorded in Chinese history, a great victory of global significance for socialism and national liberation'.

After a period of Economic Recovery in the first three years (1950 to 1952) following the founding of the People's Republic, and then the basic realisation of the socialist transformation of agriculture, the handicrafts industry, and capitalist industry and commerce between 1953 and 1956, the leading role of public ownership of the means of production had been defined, and the transition from new democracy to socialism realised.

'During the ten years from 1957 to 1966, China began large-scale socialist construction. Overall, considerable achievements were made in the national economy during this decade in spite of some serious mistakes in the economic construction. The nation's total industrial fixed assets quadrupled between 1956 and 1966 and the national income increased by 58 per cent in constant prices'.

The output of essential industrial products, such as steel, coal, crude oil, generated electricity and metal cutting machine tools increased by several or, in some cases, even a dozen times, and some new and developing industries such as electronics and petrochemicals were established. Besides, work in science and technology, particularly in atomic energy, jet technology, and computers progressed rapidly'.

The Chinese leadership, while celebrating its grand, and dazzling as well, 50th anniversary of Chinese revolution on October 1 last, did not fail to show respect to the old leaders. As the whole world has seen, Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong appeared in portraits at the historic Tiananmen

Square in Beijing where half a million people celebrated the occasion.

In his official speech, Jiang Zemin reminded the audience: 'Fifty years ago today, Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed here to the world the birth of New China. Hence the Chinese people stood up and the Chinese nation entered a brand new era of development'.

### Second Opening

The Chinese leadership consider that the third historic change witnessed by the country was featured by the reform, opening up and endeavouring to achieve socialist modernisation.

'It was a new revolution initiated by the second generation of collective leadership with Deng Xiaoping at the core', Jiang Zemin told the last CPC congress.

However, China was not opened to the rest of the world for the first time in the present century. In fact, it was forced to open up in the 19th century.

In a desperate bid to protect its opium trade, Britain launched a war of aggression against China in 1840. In 1842, the Qing court signed the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing with Britain, bartering away China's national sovereignty. The treaty reduced China to a semi-colonial semi-feudal country.

But any average Chinese intellectual based in Beijing would offer any curious journalist a difference between the two incidents.

'In 1842, we were forced to open our economy for European exploitation, while the foreigners dictated terms. But in 1978, we have opened our country ourselves — with a view to further improving our economy. Presently, we sort out things with the rest of the world on the basis of mutual interests,' explains 55 year old Yang Jing, a senior researcher of the Chinese Association for International Understanding.

### Fresh air, flies and mosquitoes

Whatever the case may be, it seems that the architect of the 'reformed' China, Deng Xiaoping, was well aware of the negative implications of the western investments pouring in to the China.

He once said, 'Through the windows we have opened will enter fresh air with the rest of the world. But with the fresh air, will enter some mosquitoes and flies'.

Deng, therefore, thought of certain legal, political and ethical programmes for party comrades and the people so that they can take care of the 'mosquitoes and flies'.

However, it is not possible for any one paying a week-long visit to give a complete picture of the social and cultural changes that has taken place in the Chinese society due to the opening up of the country's economy especially to the western capital. Even then, none can ignore certain deviations.

Mao, a devoted student of Karl Marx, dreamt of an egalitarian society, which will eventually realise the communist slogan: *From each according to his/her ability and to each according to his/her needs.*

But any one visiting modern shopping malls in big cities and bargain shops in suburbs will not fail to notice that China has already started going backwards, as regards the original aims of the CPC that started a few decades ago. The mid-level CPC bosses also admit a party concern over the growing gap between the income of different segments of the society'.

To combat this phenomenon, the government has already imposed heavy personal taxes on those earning much, says the vice-minister of culture. 'The government spends such revenues to improve the lot of the lower income groups'.

Another failure, if not deviation from communist principles, of the CPC will be discernible if one looks into the party's attitude towards women. Fifty years after the revolution, women still have an insignificant role to play in the country's policy planning and their implementations.

Of the 2,979 deputies to the People's National Congress, elected to serve from 1998 to 2003, only 21.81 per cent is women. The male-female ratio in the cabinet and the party leadership is also similar. This is nothing but pure male chauvinism, a glaring contradiction to communist ideals.

The old social division of labour in China has hardly changed: women working in offices and factories still have to do domestic works almost without any assistance from their male partners.

In another development, the number of people visiting temples and religious gurus has increased over the last couple of decades, indicating lack of mental peace among the common people. The communist party officials rightly ascribe this 'indulgence' to a lack of ideological motivation, but there is hardly any significant steps to combat the rising cultural backwardness.

In the areas where foreign investments have been made, a visitor will come across night clubs and massage parlours run by Chinese girls. The westerners are still their main customers; but in a deviation from traditional Chinese culture, the rich local youths love to pay frequent visits to those places these days.

Besides, any foreigners visiting China for the first time would perhaps be taken aback when the interpreter will warn the visitor inside a dazzling shopping centre of pick-pockets. This indicates both poverty and vices like drug-addictions among youths.

### Personality cult

Nowadays one would find many a Chinese in Beijing criticising Mao Zedong for his cult of personal revolution that lasted for ten years from May 1966 which was unimaginable in Mao's time. Most of the critics, although appreciative of Mao's contribution to the creation of 'socialist China', believe that his cultural revolution 'brought great calamity to China and its people, causing serious setbacks and damaging losses to both'. The critics usually end up discussion on Mao, saying: 'You see, he was a great leader. But he was not a prophet. It is only natural that he made some mistakes'.

But if asked whether Deng Xiaoping has made any mistake, the same people would find none.

### Multi-party democracy, Chinese way

Socialist system provokes a lot of criticism of the so-called 'free world' led by the United States, especially because it does not allow multi-party democracy. Even a large number of young Marxists across the world still wonder why the communist parties cannot run 'proletarian dictatorship' allowing more than one party, especially when the bourgeois can run theirs in a multi-party system? If the socialist system is superior why do its proponents fear an encounter with ideological hegemony? The question becomes obvious when they learn that Lenin ran the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the former Soviet Union for a quite some time since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

However, China is run neither by its communist party alone nor by a multi-party

coalition in the sense of western democracy. But there are eight 'democratic parties' sharing state power with the CPC since 1949 under a system, which the Chinese call 'Multi-party Co-operation and Political Consultation System'.

Before the 1949 revolution led by the CPC, the Chinese people have witnessed certain big political movements, such as the Northern Expedition (1924-1927), the Agrarian Revolution (1927-1937), the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945) and the War of Liberation (1945-1949).

'All the eight democratic parties have shared experiences with the CPC in the said struggle for overthrowing three big mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism,' says a CPC official. 'Again, the parties have shared their experiences with the CPC in building new China since 1949. The Chinese history has taught us, both the communists and democrats, to move forward on the basis of political consensus'.

To talk about the decision making process of the government, before the state adopts important measures or makes decisions on major issues with bearing on the national economy and people's livelihood, the communist party consults with all ethnic groups, all political parties, all circles and non-party democrats in order to reach a common understanding.

The eight democratic parties have a total of 460 deputies in the 2979-member ninth National People's Congress, elected to serve from 1998 to 2003. Besides, 50 per cent of the 16 Deputy Speakers of the Congress belongs to the democratic parties. They also have representations in both provincial and central governments.

These parties have some 1.5 million members across China, against the CPC's 61 million. Nevertheless, the leadership at all levels obviously lies with the CPC.

The composition of the National People's Congress, the country's highest policy-making forum, has discernible representation of people from different sections of the society. Of the 2,979 deputies to the Congress, a total of 988 (33.16 per cent) are party cadres, 628 (21.07 per cent) intellectuals, 563 (18.89 per cent) workers and farmers, 460 (15.44 per cent) representative from various democratic parties and individuals with no party affiliations, 268 (8.99 per cent) from People's Liberation Army, 37 returned overseas Chinese (1.24 per cent), and 35 (1.21 per cent) from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

However, the Multi-party Co-operation and Political Consultation System has adopted two main forms: one is



A nation celebrates

the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the other is the Consultative Meetings and Forums of Democratic Parties and Non-party Personalities held by the CPC central committee or local party committees at different levels.

The CPPCC has a national committee and local committees at the provincial (autonomous, regional or municipal) as well as at the country (city) level, which consists of representatives from the CPC, democratic parties, non-party democrats, people's organisations, ethnic minorities and all walks of life, compatriots from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, returned overseas Chinese and specially invited individuals.

The Committees at various levels hold a plenary session once a year and have the members 'conduct special activities, go on inspection tours to various localities, hold consultations on major issues relating to major state policies, important local affairs, people's lives and the united front work and exercise democratic supervision over the work of state organs and the implementation of the state constitution and laws by offering opinions, proposals and criticisms'.

On the other hand, Consultative Conference — participated by leaders of democratic parties and representatives of non-party democrats at the invitation of the CPC central committee — are held once a year and the Forums are held once every

other month, the former mainly to discuss major state policies along the democratic line and the latter to exchange information and hear proposals on policy matters.

However, the CPC publicly admits that the country's political reforms are lagging far behind, the economic reforms, while the party has plans to expedite the process. Well, until further reforms, none can expect a revival of the old slogan, *Let hundred flowers bloom.*

With the political reforms going ahead, maybe the Chinese intellectuals would have a chance to get out of the 'golden cage' in future, and start discovering loopholes even in the Deng Xiaoping's theory which they still find 'flawless'.

### Unequal siblings

All said and done, a Bangladeshi journalist visiting China for the first time cannot help but remember that Indian sub-continent founded its communist party in 1921, the year Chinese Communist Party was formed.

Seventy-eight years after the incident, China has emerged a super power in the world. But the sub-continent, divided in three states, is still wallowing in day-to-day woes, thanks mainly to the politicians — both communists and non-communists. Let alone the macro- and micro-economic indicators, a vast majority of the region does not even have access to safe drinking water.

On the political front, ultrarightist forces are on the rise, making mockery of the so-called multi-party democracy.

When the politicians of the sub-continent are busy fighting one another on trivial issues, the Chinese leadership is spending the present for a glorious future.

Only a few months back, Jiang Zemin was quoted as saying: 'Now the whole party must maintain a high level of consciousness, firmly seize the historical opportunities at the turn of the century and take new steps forward'.

'Looking into the next century, we have set our goals as follows: In the first decade, the gross national product will double that of the year 2000, the people will enjoy even more comfortable life and a more or less ideal socialist market economy. With the efforts to be made in another decade, when the party celebrates its century, the national economy will be more developed and the various systems will be further improved. By the middle of the next century, when the people's republic celebrates century, the modernisation programme will have been accomplished by and large and China will become a prosperous, strong democratic and culturally advanced socialist country'.

China has taken lesson from its past and built on its present for a better future. In the part of the world, past, present and future has unfortunately dissolved into a nightmarish abstraction. Politicians can make the difference, for the better or the worse.

## Triumphs and tragedies

By Rachel Clarke

FIFTY years ago, Mao Zedong told tens of thousands of jubilant supporters in Tiananmen Square: 'The Chinese people have stood up'.

Half a century later, the citizens of the world's most populous country are again standing on their own 2.5 billion feet, though the intervening years have dealt them blow after blow.

The business world now looks to the People's Republic of China as perhaps the best new market to open up for decades, and as the closest thing Asia has to a superpower. The development and opening up of China have made packed to do with the Middle Kingdom more accessible, and Chinese chic and arts have become popular around the world.

It may be an ancient Chinese curse to live in interesting times, but it seems certain the coming years will bring much of interest, though hopefully fewer curses than the last 50.

It was the future that must have been on the minds of the thousands who packed to Tiananmen Square on October 1, 1949, as Mao proclaimed the People's Republic. So much had already changed since they or their parents were born at the end of the Qing Dynasty.

The Last Emperor Pu Yi had been overthrown and banished; the father of modern China, Dr Sun Yat-sen, had awoken people's desire for power; the Japanese and then the Nationalists had been defeated after long, devastating wars; the

Communists' Long March was over, and they were home in China's traditional capital surrounded by crowds and anticipation. The people were ready for change, and there was genuine jubilation as Mao stood on the rostrum in the heart of Beijing and declared that a new China was born.

Mao and his fellow leaders wasted little time in driving their revolution forward. Within months, the new government had launched agrarian reforms to redistribute the land more fairly, confiscating property from landlords to spread it among the peasants. A key Sino-Soviet pact was also signed, and Soviet engineers and technicians began to pour into China to begin industrialising the mainland.

The Chinese also entered the Korean War, fighting Americans, British and other western forces who had come to the aid of South Koreans trying to stop the spread of Communism.

Elsewhere, refugees escaping Mao's control of the mainland helped to create two thriving new areas — Taiwan, in the hands of the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek, and Hong Kong, where the hundreds of thousands who fled to the British colonial outpost into a powerhouse of Chinese capitalism.

It took the Communists little time, meanwhile, to move into the arena of propaganda and disposing of political opponents. In 1951, major political campaigns were launched against religious and political leaders deemed unhelpful to the Party cause, as well as against

corruption and anyone committing crimes against the state.

Out in the countryside, peasants were being organised into collectives and company bosses were being persuaded to enter into joint enterprises with the state. The changes were great, but it soon became clear they were unable to cure all ills. Relations with the Soviet Union began to deteriorate amid differing ideas of Communism, and Mao decided on new projects intended to show the might and potential of China but which ended up as national catastrophes.

First he called on his countrymen and women to discuss openly the work of the Party. 'Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend', he declared. But when Party leaders did not like the flowers that bloomed, particularly Western ideas discussed by intellectuals, the academics found themselves out in the cold and sent to work camps. When the Great Leap Forward portrayed as a bid to take China quickly and dynamically into the era of industrial production was announced in 1958, few dissenting voices were heard. When the leaders set vastly over-optimistic production targets, declaring that harnessing the might of the peasant workforce could bring mighty bounties, there was not criticism but compliance. Ridiculously high quotas received the same euphoric reaction, and over-zealous officials made up their own figures to show booming agricultural production. In reality, however,

crops had been left to rot in the fields as the farmers spent their time melting down every implement they had in the national drive to make pig iron. The ensuing famine killed more than 25 million people.

Pragmatists including Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi regained power after earlier purges and brought a halt to the worst excesses, but a few short years later Mao created another disaster with the start of the Cultural Revolution. Liu was again banished, along with Deng Xiaoping, as the purges began anew — this time against everything deemed traditional. Armies of Red Guards ran riot throughout the country. Intellectuals, artists and political enemies were denounced, beaten into admitting their failings and sent to re-education camps.

Shockwaves from the Cultural Revolution spread throughout China. In Tibet, which was annexed in 1950 and came under Beijing's firm grip after a failed uprising in 1959, many monasteries were destroyed. It took the intervention of Zhou Enlai to save the Potala Palace in Lhasa, as it did for many other ancient buildings around the country. The passions also spread beyond China's borders, sparking mass riots in Hong Kong.

Throughout the turmoil, Mao became stronger and stronger as he developed a personality cult he had once derided but later encouraged. The country, meanwhile, was also moving into the international sphere of attention. It had exploded its own atomic bomb in

1964, and in 1971 the United Nations expelled Taiwan and admitted the PRC. It was at this time that behind-the-scenes moves were being made between the United States and China for Richard Nixon's visit in 1972 when he switched the US policy from recognising two Chinas to just the one, though full diplomatic relations only came later.

Four years later, both Mao and Zhou Enlai were dead. The power of the Gang of Four, led by Mao's widow Jiang Qing, was soon negated by Deng Xiaoping, who had returned to the top ranks of leadership before being dismissed yet again. His isolation did not last long, though, and he was back in favour a year later and soon pushing his Four Modernisations in agriculture, industry, defence and science. His ideas, far more pragmatic than Mao's, were accepted, and he effectively became China's leader.

As China finally opened its doors to the outside world in the late 1970s, formal diplomatic relations were established with the United States. Investment was ploughed into Deng's Special Economic Zones, including Shenzhen, across the Dongjiang River from Hong Kong, which was transformed from farmland to a bustling city in just a few years.

Shenzhen was seen by some as an imitation of Hong Kong, and talks on the real thing were now beginning.