

Regional autonomy boosts development of China's ethnic minorities

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THE aggregate population of ethnic minorities has never accounted for more than 9 per cent of China's total, currently approaching 1.3 billion. Yet their development and prosperity have always been high on the agenda of the leaders of the People's Republic.

One of the first things Chinese leaders did after New China was founded in 1949 was to conduct large-scale studies to identify the country's ethnic groups and name them properly, based on scientific research and each group's individual preference. The work spanned four decades before 55 ethnic minorities were finally identified from hundreds of groups and tribes.

This identification work was to pave the way for the implementation of the system of ethnic autonomy in areas inhabited by minorities, and realise equality among all ethnic groups," says Prof Chen Liankai of the Central Ethnicity University who was involved in the studies 50 years ago.

Before 1949, the central governments from various periods in China had their own policies and systems in place for overseeing ethnic affairs. But none of them, whether set up by the Han people or by ethnic minorities, worked to secure any measure of equality among ethnic groups, Chen says. The founding of New China marked a new era in which all ethnic groups in the country could enjoy equality, unity and mutual assistance. "Equality and unity among ethnic groups as the basic principle and policy for resolving ethnic problems has been clearly defined in the Constitution and relevant laws," Chen says.

Nagpao Nagwang Jigme, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, signed the agreement on the peaceful liberation of Tibet on May 23, 1951 as the chief delegate of the local government of Tibet with the central government. He says, "The establishment and ongoing fine-tuning of the basic political system of regional ethnic autonomy have become the cornerstones of Tibet's development and prosperity." This means Tibetans have enjoyed regional autonomy in legislation, language, management and exploitation of both local human and natural resources, he says.

All of China's 55 ethnic groups now have deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC), the highest example of how the social status of

legislature of China, and members in the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The ethnic groups, who account for 8.98 per cent of China's population, have 428 NPC deputies, or 14.37 per cent of the total NPC deputies, and have 257 CPPCC members, or 11.7 per cent of the total CPPCC members.

The country has 2.7 million officials of ethnic minority background.

In places where a minority has a population amounting to one-third of the total in the locality, ethnic autonomy legally can be established in name. To date, China has five provincial-level autonomous regions, 30 autonomous prefectures, 120 autonomous counties or banners, and more than 1,200 townships of various ethnic groups. Among China's 55 ethnic minority groups, 45 have set up autonomous regions that operate under the self system, some under the slave system, and some even in primitive society.

After the founding of the People's Republic, the Chinese government adopted different measures to institute democratic reform step-up in the minority areas in accordance with the will of the majority of the people in these areas. This reform was completed in the late 1950s.

Fifty years ago, when he was a 7-year-old child in a serf's family, Legqog, a native of Gyangze in western Tibet, never expected to become chairman of Tibet Autonomous Region. "Sers' children were born to be serfs at the time in Tibet," he says.

At that time, Tibet was still under feudal serfdom. But the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951 and the ensuing democratic reform in 1959 changed the fate of Legqog and millions of Tibetans like him. "We became masters of our own destiny for the first time in history," says the 57-year-old official. "We gained the right to vote and stand for election. And we got directly involved in the administration of our hometown by means of the regional autonomy by ethnic minorities."

The central government has promoted economic development and social progress, and improved the living standard of local people in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities by offering preferential policies as well as support in funds, technologies and skilled professionals.

"Over the past 54 years," says Uyinqing, "people of Inner Mongolia have enjoyed social stability and constant improvement of living standards. Since 1996, the

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women of ethnic minorities has improved. According to a survey conducted by Ethnic Unity, a monthly publication focusing on development issues facing ethnic minorities, 43 of China's 55 ethnic minorities now have women working as journalists.

The aggressiveness required of a professional journalist is a sharp contrast to the stereotype of China's ethnic minority women -- reserved and domestic, says Temur, editor-in-chief of the magazine, who is a Uyghur himself. In the five ethnic autonomous regions, women reporters are mostly from local ethnic groups. Only some smaller groups living in remote areas do not have women reporters.

In old China, the economic and social development of the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities was unbalanced; some areas featured a society that operated under the self system, some under the slave system, and some even in primitive society.

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increase in the region's gross domestic products (GDP), per capita disposable income for urban residents, and net income of average farmers and herdsmen, and the growth rate of the region's revenue have all continuously stood above the national average."

Statistics show that the GDP of all regions mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities across the country increased to 708.7 billion yuan (about US \$85 billion) in 1997 from 1978's 32.4 billion yuan (about US \$3.9 billion), a 21-fold increase and an annual growth rate of 10.9 per cent, which was 1.1 percentage points higher than the national average. In the 40 years since the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region was established, its GDP went up 32-fold, financial revenue up 50-fold, and per capita income of both urban and rural residents up 30-fold.

The central government has attached great importance to the ethnic minorities' rights to education and culture. The Central Ethnicity University (formally the Central Ethnicity Institute) was established in 1951, when the country was still engaged in the Korean War (1950-53). Since then, almost all areas with large concentrations of minority communities have set up schools for minority students. By 1997, the number of ethnic teachers nationwide increased to 833,200 from 433,000 in 1978; the number of ethnic students enrolled in schools at different levels increased from 10,248 million to more than 29 million.

Meanwhile, the ethnic minorities also emphasize the protection of the freedom of ethnic minorities in religious beliefs. Imam Chen Guangyuan, president of the China Islamic Association and the China Islamic Institute, says, "Now is the best time in China's history for all religions."

Islam has more followers than any other religion among ethnic groups in China. In China there are ten Muslim minorities whose total population stands at 20 million. They are mostly in Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai and are also scattered throughout China's vast acreage.

Islam is home to 1.78 million Hui Muslims, more than 100 million on average have made the pilgrimage to Mecca every year for the past two decades, says Yang Shengrui, an official of the regional commission of ethnic affairs. Before 1978, only seven Hui Muslims from Ningxia had travelled to Mecca for the hajj. In Xinjiang, where there are 9 million Muslims, accounting for almost half of China's total Muslim population and 23,000 mosques, two-thirds of the total number in the country, more than 30,000 Muslims have gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia in recent years.

According to Chen Guangyuan, more than 5,000 Chinese pilgrims visit there every year.

Upon completion, the project will link up the Yangtze, Huaihe, the Yellow River and Haihe valleys, forming a network of four horizontal and three vertical waterways that allows a rational allocation of the country's water resources nationwide. The project is designed to divert 38-48 billion cubic meters of river water a year, which equal the annual flow of the Yellow River, the second longest in China. It is expected to quench the thirst in the north and break the bottleneck hampering economic and social development in China so as to promote a sustainable social and economic development and benefit future generations, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.

With the relocation of water resources, not only some 20 large and medium-sized cities like Beijing, Tianjin and Shijiazhuang will be relieved of the constraints of water shortage, new economic growth points will rise up along the new waterways, especially in the western regions in a short time.

New projects to balance China's resources

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Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2001-2005) published earlier this year proposes launching the project as early as possible, and the construction of Qinghai-Tibet Railway was already inaugurated on July 1.

South-to-north-water diversion project

According to the 10 Five-Year Plan, water will be diverted from the south via three channels in the eastern, central and western regions, respectively.

The western route draws water from Tongtianhe, Yalongjiang and Daduhe, tributaries of the Yangtze River in southwest China, to the upper reaches of the Yellow River to solve water shortage in the northwestern regions. The central route is to fetch water from the Danjiangkou Reservoir on the border between Hubei and Henan provinces to Beijing and Tianjin. The eastern route draws water at Yangzhou on the lower reaches of the Yangtze, flowing through a section of the ancient Grand Canal and lakes northward to reach Hebei and Tianjin.

At the fourth session of the Ninth National People's Congress last March, a revised Law on the Regional Ethnic Autonomy was adopted, with articles increased from 67 to 74. The revised law specifies that the regional ethnic autonomy is "a basic political system of the State," and it emphasizes the State support and assistance to localities where ethnic autonomy is exercised.

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produced in the western regions to the eastern regions where they are needed is a landmark for the campaign to develop the less developed western regions.

During the next five years, the country's Tenth Five-Year Plan period, electricity will be transmitted from the west via three routes.

The northern route is to transmit thermal power from Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Shaanxi Province, which abound in coal, to the North China Power Grid. In due time, 2.7 million kilowatts of power will be sent to the Beijing-Tianjin-Tanggu area. The central route is to send hydroelectricity from Sichuan and other central China provinces to the Central China Power Grid and East China Grid. The southern route is to send hydropower from Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi provinces in the southwest to the South China Power Grid. In five years time, Guangdong Province alone will have 10 million more kilowatts of electricity.

Construction of Longtan Power Station, China's second largest hydraulic power station after the Three Gorges Project, was inaugurated on July 1, 2001, coinciding with the 80 anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. With an initial designed generating capacity of 4.2 million kw it is one of the ten large projects for developing the western regions. The project will break three records in the world's hydropower station construction: a dam of 192 meters high (ultimately 216.5 meters high), an underground hall of 388.5 m x 28.5 m x 73.6 m, and a boat hoisting machine of 1,700 meters long. Together with the four large hydropower stations and three power transmission projects inaugurated concurrently on November 8, 2000 in Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Yunnan and Sichuan, its formal inauguration marks the fact that the pace of the project of transmitting power from west to east has been accelerated.

In gas supply, a pipeline of 4,200 kilometers long will be laid between Xinjiang in the west to Shanghai in the east with a total investment of 14.63 billion yuan (about US\$17.7 billion). It will transport rich natural gas from Xinjiang to Shanghai and other cities in east China. According to latest surveys, the western regions have reserves of 22.4 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, capable of providing a steady supply in 30 years. Some 100 billion yuan will be invested in the first phase project alone. Construction of a pipeline

linking the western regions to the eastern regions will be eight pairs of passenger trains daily and the density of one-way cargo flow of 5 million tons.

Construction of the railway was officially inaugurated on June 29, 2001. The grand ceremonies were attended by Premier Zhu Rongji in Golmud and Vice-Premier Wu Bangguo in Lhasa. All the spending will be borne by the central government.

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Company	DSE			CSE			Financial Performance			
	FV/ML (Tk./No.)	Price Closing	Chg. (%)	Turnover Share	Price Closing	Chg. (%)	Pre Day	EPS Last	DPS AGM (Tk.)	DPS (%)
BANK										
AB Bank Ltd.	100/5	216.00	-0.35	216.75	12735	218.00	Not Traded	—	26/10/00	21.6 12.5
IFIC Bank Ltd.	100/5	378.00	0.53	376.00	1395	379.75	-2.63	390.00	10	05/07/99 23.3
Islami Bank BD Ltd.	100/1	2680.00	-0.57	2695.25	94	2696.00	0.90	2672.00	16	02/08/01 35.6 25.0
National Bank Ltd.	100/20	263.75	-1.31	267.25	18500	265.50	0.95	263.00	7480	23/06/01 53.1 30.0
Puhali Bank Ltd.	100/5	244.00	-1.31	247.25	1490	300.00	Not Traded	—	30/09/00	12.4
Rupali Bank Ltd.	100/10	90.00	0.28	89.75	750	94.75	2.99	92.00	300	12/05/01 24.4
UCBL	100/5	154.00	0.65	153.00	410	153.00	Not Traded	—	15/09/99 15.6	
Uttara Bank Ltd.	100/5	333.00	-4.24	347.75	700	—	Not Listed	—	19/12/00 19.0	
IDLC Ltd.	100/20	47.00	-1.45	48.20	20	49.20	Not Traded	—	22/05/01 46.7 30.0	
Eastern Bank Ltd.	100/20	276.00	-1.43	280.00	40	—	Not Listed	—	05/08/01 45.0	
Uttara Finance and Inv.	100/5	251.00	0.40	250.00	1850	242.75	Not Traded	—	29/05/01 28.3 20.0	
AI Arabs Islami Bank	100/5	344.75	-0.61	353.00	110	338.00	Not Traded	—	21/11/00 18.1 12.0	
Prime Bank Ltd.	100/50	38.00	-0.26	38.10	3400	38.02	0.52	36.90	1500	17/07/00 7.2 5.0
Southeast Bank Ltd.	100/50	269.50	0.94	267.00	5650	27				