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'BORDER SECURITY IS RECEIVING HIGHER SALIENCE IN TIBET'

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Over the past year, the Chinese authorities have increased emphasis on border security along the Sino-Indian Line of Actual Control (LAC). There have been a number of visits by senior TAR officials and TAR Security and Propaganda teams to villages in the border areas. This has become more pronounced after the visits by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member and Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Wang Yang to Tibet in July and August 2021 respectively. Xi Jinping's meeting in Lhasa with officers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the Tibet Military Region posted in Tibet underscored this. The number of references to strengthening border defence also appear to have increased after the appointment of the new TAR Party Secretary Wang Junzheng.

2. Apparently to compensate for the limited capabilities of aircraft at the high altitudes of the Tibetan plateau, a number of airports are now being rapidly built across the region. Already, thirty airports are reportedly under construction on the Tibetan Plateau and Xinjiang. Now, a late January report reveals that Qinghai province -- part of the original Tibet -- plans to construct 10 new airports by 2025, with at least one airport in each county. In addition, the construction of 9 new airports, which began in 2017, is to be completed by 2030. Some of these are strategically located like those in Medok, Nyingtri (opposite Arunachal Pradesh); Dromo County, Shigatse (across Yadong); Purang County, Ngari (bordering Uttarakhand); and Kyirong (on the border with Nepal). The others too are in Lhasa and near the borders with India. Construction of an additional 5 airports is planned to begin in 2022.

3. Construction of the 'xiaokang' model well-off border defence villages was accelerated and has been completed. On January 7, while presenting the Report on the Work of the Government in 2021, to the Fifth Session of the 11th TAR People's Congress, the recently-appointed Chairman of the TAR People's Government, Yan Jinhai announced that all 624 'xiaokang' villages had been completed.

4. Later, when meeting the delegates from Lhasa and Ngari (Ali) a day prior to the fifth session of the 11th TAR People's Congress, he emphasised the importance of defending the borders. He specifically told the delegates from Ngari that they must focus on improving the overall situation of the region by paying close attention to protecting the "soil and the border", industrial development and the people's livelihood for "high quality development in Ngari".

5. More recently, the Tibet Daily (January 28) publicised TAR Party Secretary Wang Junzheng's recent visit to the Tibet Entry-Exit Frontier Inspection Station in Kyirong (Ch: Geelong) in

Shigatse (Ch: Xigaze) to inspect border strengthening work, border stability maintenance and port control work. During the visit, in addition to giving political directions, Wang Junzheng told officials and border guards to thoroughly study the 'spirit' of the Sixth Plenary Session of the CCP Central Committee (CC), and consolidate border defence work, border security and resolutely defend the "southwestern border of the motherland." He told them to "build indestructible steel like border barriers" and make new contributions for long term and comprehensive stability in Tibet.

6. Wang Junzheng also visited the main command centre station at Kyirong port, the Everest Border Police Station and the Pangong lake Border Police Station, where he asked the border guards to "stick to their post in the ice and snow", but also take care of their health. He stressed that social stability in Tibet is related to national stability, and border security in Tibet is related to national security. Wang Junzheng exhorted "put the cause of the party and the people first, loyalty to the core, support to the core, maintain the core and defend the core to ensure security and stability on the border."

7. Interesting in this context is that China's official media publicised a meeting of the Tibet Military Region Party Committee in Lhasa on January 17. The report disclosed that Lt. General Yin Hongxing is the new Political Commissar of the Tibet Military Region (TMR) subordinate to the Western Theatre Command. Lt General Yin Hongxing was earlier the Political Commissar of the 71st Group Army in the Eastern Theatre Command. Born in 1965, Yin Hongxing was promoted to the rank of Lt. General in December 2021 when he was appointed Political Commissar of the Tibet Military Region (TMR). This is his first tenure in Tibet.

8. The Tibet Daily (January 19) reported that Lt General Yin Hongxing chaired the Seventh Plenary meeting of the Tibet Military Region Party Committee held in Lhasa on January 17 and presented a report. TAR Party Secretary Wang Junzheng and Lt General Wang Kai, Commander and Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of the Tibet Military Region attended the meeting and gave speeches. Meetings of the TMR Party Committee are not regularly reported.

9. In his speech, TAR Party Secretary Wang Junzheng "expressed his gratitude and respect to the officers and soldiers who have been fighting in the snow-covered plateau for a long time." He acknowledged that in the past year the Party Committee of TMR had 'vigorously implemented the decisions and work deployments of Xi Jinping and the Central Military Commission, united and led the officers and soldiers, strengthened their political stance, their ability to prepare for war and their proactiveness in working for long term stability and high-quality development in Tibet'. Wang Junzheng stressed that Xi Jinping attaches great importance to army building and work in Tibet, and that the President visited Tibet in person on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the "peaceful liberation of Tibet" and met the representatives of officers and soldiers stationed in Tibet, and had personally replied to all officers and soldiers of the "Plateau Frontier Guard Model Camp". He urged that "all levels of the TMR must always bear in mind the heavy trust of General Secretary Xi Jinping, resolutely implement Xi Jinping's thoughts on strengthening the army and the Party's strategy for governing Tibet in the new era" and deeply understand the significance of the "two establishments".

10. He asked the soldiers and officers to "faithfully perform their duties of defending the country and guarding the borders well and to strive to create a new situation of high-quality development of the army on the new journey of governing borders, stabilizing Tibet and strengthening the army". Wang Junzheng reiterated Xi Jinping's "orders to prepare for war, his insistence on placing military training in a strategic position, to combine combat training with scientific technology, to strengthen civil-military joint training in key areas such as disaster relief and emergency rescue purpose". He stressed that the Party Committees and Governments at all levels will fully support the consolidation of national defense, the army, and in solving the challenges and problems of the officers and soldiers including their work and life problems, welfare of the retired military personnel, and fostering a good atmosphere of caring for the soldiers from the society.

11. A couple of days later on January 19, the Metok (Medog) County Party Committee held its Economic Work Conference where Metok County Party Secretary Wei Changqi delivered a speech. Metok county is strategically located on TAR's border with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. It is also the site of the proposed dam -- envisaged to be the world's largest -- on the Great Bend of the Brahmaputra river. Apart from stressing strong support to the "two establishments", rural revitalisation etc., the Metok County Party Secretary laid considerable emphasis on border defence. Two of the four agenda items for the meeting focused on national security and strengthening the border.

12. The Metok County Party Secretary said it is important to firmly establish an overall national security concept and constantly build a national security barrier. He emphasised the importance of maintaining stability, carrying out the struggle against separatism and promoting ethnic unity. Focussing on strengthening the border and making the border regions and people prosperous, he said 'the emphasis should be on securing and strengthening the border and vigorously promoting border defense'. Along with the stabilisation of the border, he said it was important to promote "the anti-encroachment struggle and implement a "push forward strategy"." In this context he urged "the transfer of people in the central areas to the front line", and the need to speed up "construction of settlements in the border areas, and ensure that the people move into new homes as soon as possible". He stressed that it was "necessary to deepen the development of military-civilian integration", implement policies for supporting the army giving priority to their families, and do a good job in socialized logistics support services. He reiterated the importance of "strengthening the control of border areas, keeping an eye on the front line of the border, and building a steel Great Wall that guards the border".

13. The uptick in activity in TAR's border areas points to accelerated construction of defence-related infrastructure and improvement in living conditions for troops. This has been accompanied by stepped-up activity of the TAR's Propaganda and Security Bureaus in TAR's border areas and villages. These indicate plans for long-term, or permanent, presence of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the border areas along the LAC and possibly further military operations by the PLA.

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