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CHINESE PRESIDENT XI JINPING'S VISIT TO TIBET WAS IMPORTANT

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As anticipated, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) to participate in the celebrations to mark the 60th founding anniversary of the TAR. Due to security concerns he did not visit Lhasa on September 9 – the actual date of the anniversary – but on August 20-21 and the dates of the visit were not disclosed till just hours earlier. Chinese leaders have avoided visiting Lhasa on the actual date of the anniversary for nearly the past fifteen years. The last time China celebrated this anniversary in Lhasa on September 9 was the tenth anniversary in 1975. It has subsequently been held on September 1, except in 2015, when it was held on September 8.

2. This year Xi Jinping led an unusually high-level delegation which included three members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), including Xi, and three members of the Politburo. The composition of the entourage is indicative that high level discussions were held during the visit. Some important personnel changes and major infrastructure, mining and hydrological projects will have been approved. Significant was that in addition to Xi Jinping meeting PLA officers of the rank of Colonel and above of the Tibet Military Region in Lhasa, central leaders separately visited important military locations on the China-India border where military activities have taken place in recent years. Among them were Shigatse, Demchok, Tashigang, and other places in Ngari and Shannan. The inclusion of Central Military Commission (CMC) member and Head of the CMC's Discipline Inspection Commission, General Zhang Shengmin suggests personnel changes in the Tibet Military Region are likely. This could mean that PLA officers may be placed under investigation. Intriguingly, while there was pronounced emphasis on ethnic unity and Sinification of Tibetan Buddhism, the China-selected 11th Panchen Lama Gyaincain Norbu (Gyaltzen Norbu) does not appear to have met Xi Jinping. In fact, the official Chinese media did not mention him even once in their extensive reporting on Xi Jinping's visit to Tibet. The solitary indication of his presence in TAR was a photograph of him among others with Wang Huning when the latter visited the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the Panchen Lama's traditional main monastery in Shigatse.

3. Preparatory to Xi Jinping's visit, China's official media published headlines pointing to Xi Jinping's special interest in Tibet declaring that "The General Secretary's Heart Is on the Snowy Plateau". Official media articles described this as a "year of special significance" and enumerated the achievements in the development of TAR. Coinciding with Xi Jinping's arrival in Lhasa on August 20, Tibet's official Kangba TV telecast that "In September 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was established" and claiming that since then "under the loving care of the Party Central Committee and the selfless support of the people across the country", the people of all ethnic groups in Tibet have transformed "the impoverished and backward old Tibet" into a modern, stable, prosperous "socialist Tibet". Kangba TV also reported that Lhasa City, Shannan City and Qamdo City celebrated the event with lights and festivities and that

veterans from Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangdong, and Chongqing gathered in their hometowns to reminisce about the glorious past and appreciate the new look of the countryside

4. Xinhua (August 20) reported that Xi Jinping arrived in Lhasa by special plane to a warm welcome at 12.00 noon on August 20. He was accompanied by Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member and Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) Wang Huning and PBSC member and Director of the CCP CC General Office Cai Qi. Others in the entourage were: Politburo member and Head of the CCP CC United Front Work Department (UFWD) Li Ganjie, who is also deputy head of this delegation; Politburo member and Vice Premier of the State Council Zhang Guoqing; National People's Congress (NPC) Vice Chairman Lobsang Gyaltzen; CPPCC Vice Chairman and former Party Secretary of TAR Hu Chunhua; Central Military Commission (CMC) member and head of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission (DIC) General Zhang Shengmin; Politburo member and Vice Premier He Lifeng; and member of the CCP CC Secretariat, State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong.

5. The same day (August 20), Xi Jinping listened to the work report of the TAR Party Committee and Government presented by TAR Party Secretary Wang Junzheng. Pabala Geleg Namgyal, NPC Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Regional CPPCC, Yan Jinhai, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Regional People's Congress, and Karma Tsedun, Chairman of the Regional People's Government, attended the briefing.

6. Later addressing Party and government cadres, Xi Jinping stressed that Tibet must "fully implement the Party's strategy for governing Tibet in the new era, adhere to the general working principle of seeking progress while maintaining stability, fully and accurately implement the new development concept, solidly promote high-quality development, and continuously and thoroughly focus on the four major tasks of stability, development, ecology, and strengthening the border area" while "striving to build a united, prosperous, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful socialist modern new Tibet". He stressed that Tibet has "undergone earth-shaking changes" because of the CCP's leadership role over the past 60 years, which had attracted worldwide attention.

7. Xi Jinping underscored that governing, stabilizing, and developing Tibet primarily requires maintaining political stability, social stability, ethnic unity, and religious harmony in Tibet. He said "We must further strengthen the sense of community among the Chinese nation and advance its building. We must strengthen publicity and education on the history of the Party, the history of the People's Republic of China, the history of reform and opening up, the history of social development, and the history of the Chinese nation". He asserted the importance of guiding "cadres and people of all ethnic groups to continuously enhance their "five identities". He said it is necessary to actively create a national model region for ethnic unity and progress, promote the popularization of the national common language and script, foster exchanges and integration among all ethnic groups, and promote economic, cultural, and personnel exchanges between Tibet and the mainland. Xi Jinping emphasised that Tibetan Buddhism must be guided to adapt to socialist society in accordance with the Sinicization of religions.

8. Xi Jinping stressed the importance of strengthening Party leadership, better serving the people, and consolidating the foundation of social governance. He told cadres that to do a

good job in Tibet it is essential to conscientiously implement the political responsibility of “comprehensively and strictly govern the Party, adhere to the integration of rectifying work style, strengthening discipline, and combating corruption”, eradicate the corrupt, and create a clean and upright political environment.

9. Stating that high-quality development should be promoted based on actual conditions and resource processing industries should be continuously developed, he said modern service industries should be actively developed, and cultural and tourism industries should be promoted. The construction of major projects such as the Ya'an-Xiamen Hydropower Project and the Sichuan-Tibet Railway should be vigorously, orderly, and effectively promoted. He also spoke of ecological civilization development, reducing carbon emissions, pollution, expanding green areas and safeguarding the "Roof of the World" and "Water Tower of Asia".

10. The Workers Daily disclosed that on August 20 afternoon, Chinese President Xi Jinping met representatives of all ethnic groups and all walks of life in Tibet and, on behalf of the Party Central Committee, "extended sincere greetings and heartfelt wishes to the people of all ethnic groups in Tibet". He expressed the hope that everyone will continue to work together and in unity to promote Chinese-style modernization in Tibet. Xi Jinping also met Aid-Tibet cadres, "responsible cadres and veteran cadres from the autonomous region and relevant departments, cities and prefectures, representatives of political and legal police officers, patriotic figures from the religious community and representatives of temple management committee cadres". The Workers Daily mentioned that Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Li Ganjie, He Lifeng, Zhang Guoqing, Wang Xiaohong, Lobsang Gyaltsen, Hu Chunhua, Pagbala Gyalwa and Zhang Shengmin, veteran comrades who have worked in Tibet, and responsible comrades from relevant departments of the central and state organs attended the meeting.

11. The same (August 20) afternoon Xi Jinping met officers of the rank of Colonel and above, as well as some advanced grassroots models and civilian personnel, stationed in the Tibet Military region. He greeted them and took a group photo with them. Pointing to the continuing importance of the situation on the border, noticed among those attending was General Zhao Zongqi in the full military uniform of a 3-star General. Zhao Zongqi was formerly Commander of the Western Theatre Command (WTC) during the Doklam stand-off and the Galwan clash. Seated with Xi Jinping were Lt General Wang Kai, Commander Tibet Military Region (TMR) and General Yuan Hongguang, Political Commissar of TMR and to his left Gen Zhang Shengmin. Strangely, missing in the main photograph were the WTC Commander Gen Wang Haijiang and Lieutenant General Fang Yongxiang, Director of the General Office of the Central Military Commission (CMC).

12. On August 21, PBSC member and CPPCC Chairman Wang Huning addressed the 20,000-strong gathering in Lhasa's Potala Square while Xi Jinping watched from the podium. Largely echoing Xi Jinping's speech of the previous day, Wang Huning asserted that under President Xi Jinping's guidance and comprehensive plan "Tibet has entered its best period of development, experiencing the greatest changes and bringing the most tangible benefits to people of all ethnic groups". He said Tibet had achieved "historic progress" in poverty reduction, social development, and ethnic unity and major national projects and policies had transformed the region, leading to improved living standards and a "vibrant, modern socialist Tibet". He credited all achievements to the leadership of the CCP. Describing the CCP as "the

most reliable backbone for people of all ethnic groups”, Wang Huning urged TAR to adhere to and strengthen the party’s leadership. He exhorted Tibet to “firmly safeguard national security and long-term stability” and said “We should deeply carry out the fight against corruption to ensure the consolidation of border areas and border security”. He declared that “Tibet has always been an inseparable part of China’s sacred territory. Tibet affairs are purely China’s internal matters, and no external forces are allowed to interfere. Any schemes to split the motherland or undermine Tibet’s stability are doomed to fail.”

13. Bolstering these claims of development and improvement in people’s lives, Xinhua reported that Tibet’s GDP reached 276.5 billion yuan (US\$38.5 billion) by 2024 – 155 times higher than in 1965, with an average annual growth of 8.9 per cent. According to the report, the per capita disposable income of Tibet’s urban residents rose to 55,444 yuan (US\$7,721), 121 times greater than in 1965, while the equivalent for rural areas reached 21,578 yuan (US\$3,000) – an increase of 199 times the 1965 level.

14. While Xi Jinping, Cai Qi and Wang Xiaohong returned to Beijing on August 21, other senior members of the entourage stayed behind and fanned out to different parts of the TAR.

a) Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member and CPPCC Chairman Wang Huning visited multiple cities in Shigatse and Tingri to ascertain measures taken for earthquake rehabilitation. He urged efforts to carry out the reconstruction work in a meticulous and solid manner, prevent disaster-induced poverty and build new homes. Wang Huning called for giving full play to the key role of grassroots Party organizations and promoting all-around rural revitalization. Touring the Shigatse International Land Port export cargo inspection facility, and the Jiangsa National Wetland Park in Shigatse he stressed the need to promote the high-quality development of Xizang and enhance ecological conservation and environmental protection in the plateau region. He and his delegation inspected the development of higher education at Xizang University and a park to observe afforestation and greening efforts. They also visited Aya Village in Gadong Town, Bailang County. Meeting senior officials of the city of Lhasa and representatives from various ethnic groups and sectors, Wang Huning called for efforts to advance the four major tasks -- ensuring stability, facilitating development, protecting eco-environment, and strengthening frontiers, thereby making new contributions to promoting lasting peace, stability, and high-quality development in Xizang.

Wang Huning visited “patriotic figures” from Xizang’s religious circles at the Jokhang Temple, when he expressed the hope that they will resolutely safeguard national unity and ethnic solidarity, and actively participate in building a modern socialist new Xizang. Tibet Daily (August 22) published a photograph of Wang Huning meeting the religious figures where the China-selected 11th Panchen Lama Gyaincain Norbu (Gyaltzen Norbu) was also present.

b) Politburo member and Head of the CCP CC UFWD, Li Ganjie travelled to Ngari and Tashigang near Demchok. Together with a delegation from Ngari, they visited the Dianjiao Village Committee of Zhaxigang Township, Gar County, Ngari Prefecture, "to learn about the situation". They met members of the leadership groups and representatives from various ethnic groups and sectors at the Ngari Prefectural Party Committee compound. They also visited communities, schools, industrial parks, and hospitals to learn about the consolidation and expansion of poverty alleviation achievements, grassroots governance, education aid to

Tibet, agricultural development, and medical and health services. During the visits Li Ganjie emphasized the need to deepen border development initiatives, guide cadres and people of all ethnic groups to strengthen the “Five Identities,” promote exchanges and integration among ethnic groups, and “thoroughly implement work such as improving livelihoods, developing plateau-specific industries, strengthening ecological civilization, and enhancing assistance to Tibet, ensuring that all ethnic groups share in the fruits of Chinese modernization.”

c) Politburo member Zhang Guoqing went to Chamdo. Zhang Guoqing led a delegation from Qamdo to conduct research first at Jixiang Square in the Qamdo Digital Ecological Industrial Park delegation and later to the Chamdo Smart Eco-Industrial Park where they witnessed a skills demonstration event titled ‘Red Chamdo’ -- Revitalization and Progress.’ Later they visited Jitang Community to inspect grassroots Party building and visit retired veteran Party members. In the afternoon, they toured Dongfang Electric’s high-altitude wind power industrial base in the Chamdo New District to inspect the development of clean energy. They also met with members of the Qamdo City leadership team and representatives from various ethnic groups and sectors. At Jampaling Monastery, Zhang Guoqing received a detailed briefing about Monastic Management and cultural relics preservation, after which he presented a congratulatory banner with an inscription by Xi Jinping titled “Let’s jointly forge a community of the Chinese nation and write a new chapter in a beautiful Tibet.”

d) NPC Vice Chairman Lobsang Gyaltsen, who is an ethnic Tibetan, went to Nagchu and led a delegation from Nagqu to Hangjia New Village in Senyi District for research and visits to herders. They inspected the Clean Energy Industrial Park and hospital, presented a congratulatory banner to Xiaodeng Monastery, and visited a primary school in Nagqu where they were briefed about its education and teaching. They also visited the Municipal Party and Government Conference Center to meet members of the leadership team and representatives from various ethnic groups and sectors.

e) CPPCC Vice Chairman Hu Chunhua went to Nyingchi and, accompanied by a delegation from there, visited the site of the hydropower projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo and the railway line Chengdu-Nyingchi. He led a delegation from Linzhi to the Milin Reservoir dam site to meet frontline workers. They visited Liding Village in Linzhi Town to observe the progress in rural revitalization. They also inspected the progress in construction at the exit of the Sejila Mountain Tunnel on the Sichuan-Tibet Railway. They conducted research at the Municipal Government Service Center and met leadership team members and representatives from various ethnic groups and sectors at the Municipal Party and Government Conference Center where they also posed for a group photograph.

f) CMC member, Head of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission, and deputy head of the Central Delegation General Zhang Shengmin led a delegation from Shannan to visit Zhaxi Qudeng and Kesong communities in Naidong District, Shannan City. He was briefed on the development of Hemei Village and learnt about “beautiful village construction, intangible cultural heritage protection, and Tibet’s first “Democratic Reform Village.” They also visited people’s homes and communities and planting bases and technology companies to learn more about the party building leading grassroots governance, characteristic industrial development, and drone emergency rescue. Zhang Shengmin also met members of

leadership groups and representatives from various ethnic groups and sectors at the Shannan Municipal Party Committee compound. He said that Shannan City should continue to do a good job in-depth stability, development, ecology, and focus on four major tasks: develop the characteristic industries of the plateau according to local conditions, especially the characteristic agriculture and animal husbandry and clean energy industries; strengthen the construction of ecological civilization; and strive to achieve a harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Zhang Shengmin visited the Shannan Military Sub-district and grassroots units to conduct research and greet officers and soldiers.

15. This was Xi Jinping's second visit to TAR as China's President and while his visit was brief, the visits to other parts of TAR by senior members of the central delegation was revealing. There was adequate indication, including the not so subtle presence in full uniform of General Zhao Zongqi, that the Chinese leadership remains attentive to the situation on the border. The central delegation visited all the prefectures and areas bordering India which witnessed military activity in recent years. The visits to Ngari and Shannan confirmed that CCP Propaganda and Security Bureaus in TAR are active. Xi Jinping's speech and the visits to places in TAR by members of the central delegation show that efforts to enforce Mandarin in schools in TAR, Sinicise Tibetan Buddhism, and get Tibetans to accept socialism with Chinese characteristics and Han culture, will be intensified. Construction of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway and major railways linking TAR to provinces in the Mainland will be accelerated. Work on the massive Yarlung Tsangpo Water Diversion Project will similarly be speeded up with more dams coming up on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra). The next few years will see an influx of companies and workers from the Mainland into Tibet to mine for important natural resources and accelerate construction of infrastructure projects. Efforts to get monks and Tibetans to accept 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' will also be intensified.

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