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A series of politically significant events have taken place in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since the end of February 2016. Prima facie, they seem to mark the beginning of a movement spearheaded by some elements within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and sections of social elites in the country like the business circles and intelligentsia against certain policies and style of functioning of Xi Jinping, who has been able to emerge as the PRC's supreme leader through concentration of power in his hands, thus raising questions for the 'collective leadership' governing principle accepted in the Post-Deng Xiaoping era.

A list of such events (11 in number, arranged in chronological order) is given below as Appendix. A prominent development is the release of Panama Papers exposing the involvement of Xi's brother in law in the investment in off shore companies, which appears to be not a crime in China and internationally also. But Xi, as a leader, was expected to assume some amount of moral responsibility in the matter; on the contrary, neither he nor the party or government said anything on the papers. This silence can damage the image of Xi which otherwise remains popular due to his willingness to fight against corrupt 'tigers and flies' in the country. It indeed goes against the spirit of the leader's exhortation to the politburo members in December 2015 to "strictly educate and supervise their children and other family members as well as subordinates and to rectify their problems in a timely manner, and to stay away from vulgar taste and set good examples for other cadres and general public"

More serious at the same time are attacks on Xi, as the list suggests, for his failure to listen to opinions from others in the party and for imposing media restrictions, especially for asking the press to 'bear the surname of the party'. The intra party criticisms against Xi, as noticed in the document of the party anti-corruption body, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC), the observations of a

Central Party School scholar and the CCP's admission now of existence of views in the party considering Xi's anti-corruption campaign as a power struggle, all figuring in the list, are equally noteworthy. Also, though withdrawn later, it was a party website which carried demands for Xi to resign. It is impossible for such anti-Xi comments to appear in public without the blessings of some sections still powerful in the party which could have become wary of Xi's policies.

The question arises – are some CCP elders, still influential, not confident about Xi's leadership at this juncture? The party under Xi Jinping seems to think so. For e.g., People's Daily (Chinese language edition), the CCP's mouthpiece, carried a signed commentary contributed by Gu Bochong, a Deputy chief in the General Political Department of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) and a member of the CCP-managed China Writers Association on August 10, 2015, which alleged that "some retired leading cadres", while they were in office, put their "cronies" in key positions, so that they can interfere in the work of their original organizations and wield influence in the future. This is making new leaders feel that unnecessary concerns affect their work as their "hands and feet" are being fettered". (China: 'Some retired leading cadres interfere in organizational work through their cronies' - Is Jiang Zemin being targeted? <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/1835#sthash.6RHobtRd.dpuf> [1], August 12, 2015).

As Andrew Nathan, a noted Sinologist correctly points out (Cracks in Xi Jinping's Fortress?, China File conversation, March 21, 2016), "the issue of CDIC document is an act of remonstrance: although it emanates from a posture of loyalty to the leader, it presents a more serious challenge. Chinese political tradition gives great value to "loyal remonstrance" (*jiàn*, 谏), in which one warns a powerful figure as a way of serving him, at the risk of one's head. Remonstrance comes from within the leader's camp, rather than from opponents. And, as the historical and literary allusions in the document suggest, it comes about when the leader is in great danger—from himself. Observers will puzzle over whether the head of the CDIC, Xi's close comrade-in-arms Wang Qishan, knew about this document in advance. Even if he did not, the fact that it appeared on the website of the Party's own enforcement arm suggests that Xi's most fervent supporters are the ones most worried about the path he has taken."

It should be borne in mind that the anti-Xi atmosphere as reflected in the list, cannot be taken as an indicator to Xi's imminent downfall. Everything looks normal as of now; Xi is regularly meeting foreign leaders and remains active in taking part in several domestic events. The somewhat optimistic economic picture in the country in the first quarter of 2016, should be encouraging to Xi. Also, there is nothing unusual happening in China in the diplomatic and military fronts. But if the atmosphere gains further momentum, it may have the potential to damage the future cohesiveness of the party and hurt the authority of Xi himself. Xi may have to find a way to counter it, especially to enable him in assuming as party chief for next five years during the 19th party congress scheduled in 2017. The leader's latest launching of a one-year campaign to educate cadres assumes a meaning in this regard. If the domestic political pressure becomes more serious for Xi, there can be two signs that would confirm- more excessive restrictions on local dissenters in China and the PRC's indulging in more aggressive actions on territorial issues, particularly on South China Sea issue. These however appear to be hypothetical at the moment.

Appendix

February 28, 2016: Ren Zhiqiang (66), a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member and a well-connected business tycoon in China, openly challenged in his microblog the party chief Xi Jinping's views expressed at a media forum held on February 19, 2016 that the news media should serve the party's interests and that they should "bear the party surname", speak for the party and its propositions and protect the party's authority and unity. Ren argued that if the media are loyal first to the party and don't represent the interests of the people, then the people will be abandoned in a forgotten corner. The political significance of such remarks can be easily understood against the status which Ren enjoys. He was the son of former Vice-Minister of Commerce; a cadre who went to Yanan during cultural revolution days along with China's current top leaders, Xi Jinping and Wang Qishan; a former soldier with the People's Liberation Army in eighties; the head till recently of the Huayuan Properties Company; an official of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and a blogger on China's Twitter 'Sina Weibo' with more than 37 million followers, It was no surprise that Ren's remarks were met with sharp criticism from party-controlled media; the state internet control bureau was quick to delete his microblog; messages in his support were rapidly removed from social media sites.

March 1, 2016: China's Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) website (http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/xcyj/lstj/201602/t20160229_75034.html) [3] carried an article captioned "The Fawning assent of a 1000 people cannot match the honest advice of one" which used historical allegory to criticize those in power in China for not listening to opinions of advisers. It called for debates on policies and praised the seventh century Tang dynasty emperor Tai Zong (599- 649) for his willingness to consider suggestions and criticisms from officials as he ruled. The article said that ability to air opinions freely determined the rise and fall of dynasties, adding that "we should not be afraid of people saying wrong things; we should be afraid of people not speaking at all". (in Chinese- ??????????????????????, 2016-03-01)

March 3, 2016: Jiang Hong, a CPPCC delegate from Guangdong, said in an article that appeared on the official Caixin magazine that advisors should be free to give Party and government agencies suggestions on economic, political, cultural and societal issues. He added that the party has a tradition of listening to different opinions and that the right of the people to speak freely was enshrined in the country's constitution. The Caixin coverage was promptly removed by the authorities ("Caixin challenges censors after Xi demands loyalty", China Digital Times, April 18, 2016).

March 4, 2016: Coinciding with opening of National People's Congress (NPC) and CPPCC sessions, the Wujie News website published an open letter signed by a group of "loyal party members", which called for Xi Jinping's resignation from all party and state leadership positions. The letter described Xi's anti-corruption campaign as "merely a power struggle". It blamed Xi for an atmosphere of political, economic,

ideological and cultural anxiety currently prevailing in China besides pointing out that the personal safety of the President and his family could be in jeopardy if the leader does not comply. (for Chinese-????????????????????????????????, <http://www.watching.cn/show-2-76713.html> [4], 2016-o3-04) *Wujie News* is a joint venture owned by SEEC Media Group (publisher of *Caijing*, a highly respected publication), Alibaba, and the government of Xinjiang. The Chinese police subsequently arrested 11 individuals in connection with the letter.

March 7, 2016: Zhou Fang, a Xinhua editor posted an open letter online denouncing the increasingly tight media constraints in China and alleging that they are triggering tremendous fear and outrage among the public. The letter rejected the official criticisms of Ren Zhiqiang on party-run websites, which called him a traitor and a subversive for taking issue with Mr. Xi's demand that state-run media should unflinchingly obey the party. It charged that the criticisms reflected a kind of cultural revolution-style mass campaign and abuses of power by the authorities. (Chris Buckley, *New York Times*, March 11, 2016, <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20160313/c13china/> [5]).

March 24, 2016: Professor Cai Xia of the CCP Party School, wrote an article captioned "The Constitution and Regulations Ensure the Rights of Party Members like Ren Zhiqiang". She said in the article that attacking Ren is a violation of the party constitution, blocked discussion in the party and damaged party solidarity. She added that the party constitution clearly ensures Ren's rights to express his opinion and no person or organization have the right to deprive him of it. She charged that Ren was tagged with a terrifying political label when he was questioning only the need for publicly funded media to be loyal to the party. Cai opined that discussion platform within the party was not sound and did not allow smooth expressions of opinion, as a result of which different views were sometimes voiced outside the party.

The article was soon deleted by the authorities from social media and online chatrooms. (<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/03/01/468573357/in-social-med...> [6])

March 28, 2016: Southern Metropolis Daily editor Yu Shaolei resigned from his post in protest against Xi Jinping's call to the media to "bear the party name".

March 29, 2016: A second open letter from 171 CCP members was issued in a micro blog, demanding that Xi Jinping should resign from all his posts in and outside the party, including in the military and government. (Chinese-?????171??, http://www.mingjingnews.com/MIB/blog/blog_contents.aspx?ID=0000690000001982 [7]).

April 2, 2016: Qiu Shi, the CCP's theoretical organ, lashed out at critics of Xi Jinping's ongoing anti-corruption campaign, saying foreign media and individuals from home and abroad were intentionally trying to discredit the effort as a political "power struggle." It added that those Chinese officials who think that "fighting corruption is a tool in a struggle for power" are "alarmists." The actual aim of Beijing's campaign, according to the organ, is "to consolidate the ruling status of the ruling party [by] purifying the body of the ruling party, so that there can be better contact with the flesh and blood of the masses"—that is, the Chinese public. If there's a struggle going on, the essay insisted, it's the

battle against the bad in Chinese politics, something that party officials should be grateful for.”

April 3, 2016: Foreign media (<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/06/panama-papers-reveal-offshore-secrets-china-red-nobility-big-business>) [8] released contents of what came to be known as Panama papers. Data given out by them, on the basis of revelations in the German newspaper *Suddeutsche Zeitung* and International Consortium of Investigative journalists based in Washington, disclosed the links of following Chinese former and current politicians including those of three members of the present politburo standing committee with offshore companies tied to the Law firm , Mossack Fonesca - Deng Jiagui, brother in law of Xi Jinping; Lee Shing Put, son in law of Zhang Gaoli; Jia Liqing, daughter in law of propaganda chief Liu Yunshan; Jasmine Li, daughter of former Politburo standing committee member, Jia Qinglin; Li Xiaolin, daughter of former Premier Li Peng; Gu kailai, wife of former Chongqing party chief Bo Xilai; Hu Dehua, son of former CCP chief Hu Yaobang; Zeng Qinghuai, son of former Vice-President Zeng Qinghong; son of former politburo member Tian Jiyun and Chen Dongsheng, the grand son in law of Mao Zedong. Authorities in China promptly blocked access of viewers in the country to all revelations on the subject coming from abroad; the government censors deleted all social media posts concerning Panama papers. Even a blog post which defended Xi Jinping’s family with respect to links with off shore companies and commented that Xi “had managed well the affairs of his relatives before taking over as President”, was removed by censors (Chinese- CCP affiliated website Jiemian, ??????????????????, April 12, 2016, <http://xw.qq.com/news/20160412063328/NEW2016041206332803> [9] and internet portal Ten cent, dated Apr 12, 2016). So have been the case with the coverage of Xi Jinping in connection with the paper in the *Economist* and *Time* magazines. The PRC foreign ministry dismissed (April 5, 2016) the Panama paper as “groundless accusations”. The state-run *Global Times* editorial (April 5, 2016) saw in the Panama paper a “Western conspiracy to damage the party’s reputation” and said that “the Western media has taken control of the interpretation each time there has been such a document dump, and Washington has demonstrated particular influence in it.”

April 6, 2016: The CCP chief Xi Jinping called upon the party organizations at all levels to work to ensure the effectiveness of a year-long campaign to instill rules and good values in Party members. Xi made the remarks in an instruction on the newly launched education campaign, which focuses on the study of the Party Constitution and rules, as well as the speeches made by Xi, the party general secretary. He noted in the instructions that the campaign is "a major ideological and political task" that is crucial for the "Four Comprehensives" strategy, especially in pushing strict Party management at the grassroots level. The "Four Comprehensives" strategy refers to comprehensively completing the building of a moderately prosperous society, deepening reform, advancing the rule of law and strictly governing the party (Xi calls for effective self-discipline campaign, Marxist values, Xinhua online, April 6, 2016)

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[5] <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20160313/c13china/>

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[8] <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/06/panama-papers-reveal-offshore-secrets-china-red-nobility-big-business>)

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