

BROAD TOWN - (Fourth chapter of write-up by Danny Gil for his school friends)

The flight from Beijing airport to Changsha was at 9:30 am, and Violet (“Red Pants”) told us that we had to be ready at the lobby by 7:30 am. After a sumptuous breakfast, we got ready at the lobby, and she handed us our plane tickets for Southern China Airlines, a regional airline, which I later found out had more than 200 planes, after Yogesh, one of the Indians said that it even beat their national Indian Airlines.

The flight on the Boeing 737 took about 2 hours. Changsha forms the third point of a triangle with Beijing at the apex and Shanghai on the lower right. Although the base, the distance from Changsha to Shanghai, is shorter.

Later, we would be told that Changsha is “a typical middle sized city”, about 2 million in population, in contrast to Beijing which was 12 million and Shanghai which was 14 million. And unlike Shanghai, which is about as old as Hong Kong - some 200 years - Changsha was 2000 years old. There were archeological digs to prove it, and that was on our itinerary. Changsha was also known as “fire City” - in summer it gets to be 40 deg centigrade.

Meeting us at the Changsha airport was another sign of “Welcome Broad”, held up by a petite girl who called herself “Pinky”. She was quite a contrast from Violet in Beijing who was all model-like. She spoke much better English, and had been in the company just a year.

The bus we got herded into had a Broad logo to it, and at first glance, it had only 16 seats, but then the middle aisle became seats when the adjacent armrests were folded down. Nonetheless, with all our baggage, it was a tight fit. We piled all of it at the back 2 rows. The airport was a 20 minutes drive to “Broad Town”, the official name of the company’s property, and 20 minutes further was the city of Changsha.

By this time, many of us were thinking about why Broad was located far inland. We weren’t even sure if it was a government entity or a private enterprise. Even if we asked Al, the Broad engineer from the NJ/NY office, he didn’t know a thing. He was hired recently and this trip was to be training for him; he’d stay on 2-3 more weeks after we left.

As we approached Broad Town, and saw the fenced off area, the gate and guardhouse, the looming pyramid, and the series of buildings within - plus Pinky’s revelation that our hotel was actually owned by Broad within the compound, and that 1200 people worked and lived within - we felt we were like James Bond entering Dr No’s domain.

This was fortified even more so, when after depositing our belongings at the hotel(s), we were brought to the main hall and ushered into the meeting room. It was large, with 24 seats arranged around a hexagonal table, within which a smaller hexagon had a large TV screen on each facet. In front of each of us was a console with microphone and other electronic stuff. Up front and at the rear were tables where the hosts could sit. Up at the

back were glass panels behind which, we were later told, held as many as three simultaneous translators.

I gingerly looked at my feet if there was a trapdoor. But I exaggerate.



The conference room. No trapdoor below me.

Soon after getting seated, a businesslike lady strode in and took the head seat. She reminded me very much of Mercy. She introduced herself as Judith something(?), and kept referring to “our chairman”. She spoke fairly good English, heavily accented, but from the content, she must have been an engineer, the Girl Friday of the big man.

Then it was time for lunch, after a short tour of the building. The building was relatively new, perhaps 5 years at the most. From what we gathered, it was simultaneously a museum, a dining hall, a gym (with bowling alley, billiard hall, badminton and table tennis area, swimming pool), office, meeting hall, entertainment center, kitchen, etc. And certainly it had other functions.



Part of the museum pieces at the first building



The main museum, about 6 stories high. Looms out when approaching from outside.



One of the many buildings on site.

To be continued.