



CHINA USES 60th TAR ANNIVERSARY TO UNDERMINE DALAI LAMA

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Mystery continues to shroud the high mountain fastness of Tibet where, to this day, persons who revere the Dalai Lama are engaged in a serious tussle with cadres of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for the loyalty of Tibetans. Some weeks ago, China celebrated the 60th anniversary of the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet by Chinese troops. The celebrations, which were held on July 18 instead of the date of the actual anniversary on May 23, coincided with a month-long ban on foreigners traveling to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) imposed by the authorities till July 25. Publicity in China's official media seemed to be low key for the event, where the importance of social stability and combating the 'Dalai Lama separatists' were consistently emphasized.

Signifying the importance of the event China's Vice President, Xi Jinping, arrived in Lhasa on July 18, 2011, at the head of a 59-member delegation. The Chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Chen Bingde was, quite pointedly, part of the entourage as was General Wang Jianping, Commander of the People's Armed Police Forces (PAPF). The delegation included Vice Premier Hui Liangyu; Vice Chairman and General Secretary of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) Li Jianguo; Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and Head of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee Du Qinglin; Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the CPPCC Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai; and the Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the 10th NPC, Raidi. Hard-line TAR Party

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Secretary Zhang Qingli accompanied Xi Jinping throughout his stay in Tibet.

Coinciding with the anniversary, China's State Council announced in Beijing on July 20, 2011, that the central government will invest 138.4 billion yuan (US\$21.38 billion) in TAR over the next five years to support 226 major construction projects involving a total investment of 330.5 billion yuan. The projects envisage construction of facilities for TAR's public services and infrastructure such as railways, highways, airports and hydropower plants.

The visit by Xi Jinping, who is virtually certain to succeed Hu Jintao as President of China at the 18th Party Congress scheduled for October 2012, also had symbolic value. His father, Xi Zhongxun, a contemporary of Mao Zedong and a veteran Party cadre, was reputed to be an individual with a somewhat liberal bent of mind. Xi Zhongxun, was an interlocutor for the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy Lodi Gyari in the 1980s and apparently carried a photo of the Dalai Lama. Prior to that he had some association with the 10th Panchen Lama, Tibet's second most important religious leader.

While this is unlikely to influence Xi Jinping, who was present throughout the Tibet Work Forum held in January 2010, it could have some meaning for the Tibetans.

On July 18, Xi Jinping's delegation visited Tibet University and along with 850 other invitees participated in "Sing a Folk Song to the Party Again", held at the People's Hall of Tibet. At a public reception in Lhasa the following day, Xi Jinping presented Party and Government leaders of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) a huge gold plaque inscribed by Chinese President Hu

Jintao. Speaking to over 20,000 people gathered in the square in front of the Potala Palace, former residence of the Dalai Lama, Xi Jinping asserted that "as long as we stick to the CCP's leadership, the socialist system, the system of regional ethnic autonomy and a development path with Chinese and local Tibetan features, Tibet will enjoy greater prosperity and progress and embrace a brighter future,". He added that 'social stability provides the basis' for 'leapfrog development and long-term peace'.

On July 20, Xi Jinping told a carefully selected audience of more than 100 monks, as well as 'representatives from religious circles', at Jokhang

temple in Lhasa to 'stay clear' of separatist forces. This temple's monks were involved in the severe riots that erupted across Tibet on March 14, 2008. The riots prompted authorities to launch a year-long 'political education' campaign in all the 505 monasteries in Tibet. Calling Tibet an inalienable part of China since ancient times, Xi Jinping lauded members of 'religious circles' for helping to maintain social stability, national integrity and ethnic unity.

Xinhua quoted him as saying that 'the Party and the government will not forget your positive contributions.' He urged them to be patriotic, 'stay in line with the Party and the government' and work for Tibet's development.

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The message was sought to be reinforced by Lhagba, Party secretary of Lhasa's Bagarxol village who, speaking at the ceremony, claimed 'we treasure our life now and nobody is allowed to sabotage it'. Du Yongbin, a researcher with the Beijing-based China Tibetology Research Center, underlined Beijing's concerns by candidly acknowledging that Tibet faces many challenges. He observed: 'Politically, there are separatist forces undermining Tibet's security; culturally, there is the conflict between ongoing modernization and preserving traditions.'

The second leg of the tour took Xi Jinping to the village of Bagyi in the

Nyingchi prefecture in southeastern Tibet across Arunachal Pradesh. The choice of Nyingchi is interesting. It is the site of an underground missile base and a recently built modern airport, the third in Tibet. China claims that Arunachal Pradesh is part of Nyingchi prefecture. Nyingchi is also the area where China has plans to construct a mega dam on the 'Great Bend' of the Brahmaputra River.

China's official media publicized that Xi Jinping, who last visited Nyingchi thirteen years ago as Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of Fujian Province, while visiting the homes of rural families of Nyingchi observed that many villagers had become rich. Xi Jinping reminded the people that their prosperity was a result of the Party's efforts and that the 'Han and different ethnic minorities are inter-dependent on each other'. He urged local officials to maintain long-term social stability and appreciated the contributions of personnel of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Armed Police Force and the police forces in Nyingchi.

Little publicized in the official Chinese media, but a move with potentially far reaching implications, were the invitations to select high ranking Tibetan monks residing abroad to attend the celebrations. The list appeared to have been meticulously crafted to accentuate divisions within the exiled Tibetan community and isolate the Dalai Lama.

This dovetails neatly into other efforts noticed to have been initiated by Beijing to win over Tibetan

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Buddhist monks. These include the apparent shedding of its earlier aversion to non-formal contacts with prominent Tibetans and Tibetan entities. This subtle, but significant, shift was noticed during Governor of Sichuan, Jiang Jufeng's 3-day visit to India in April, 2011. Jiang Jufeng, met privately with Tibetan activists and received Dolkar Lhamo Kirti, President of the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) and Samten Choedon, Vice President, in the Maurya Sheraton Hotel, Delhi. They discussed the protests in Kirti Monastery where 300 monks have been in jail since March 16. Accepting their petition, Jiang Jufeng assured the matter would be examined. This was the first time a visiting senior Chinese official privately met exiled Tibetans in India and that too from the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA), which has in the past been subjected to vehement criticism by the Chinese authorities.

The Paris-based Khensur Lungri Namgyel Rinpoche, the 101st and former Ganden Tripa and head of the Gelugpa sect to which the Dalai Lama belongs, visited China in the first week of July specifically to meet the Chinese-nominated Panchen Lama, Gyaincain Norbu. He did not, however, attend the 60th anniversary celebrations. The former Gaden Tripa would have been invited to bestow some legitimacy on the Chinese appointee, who is not recognised by the Dalai Lama, and thereby also embarrass the Dalai Lama. As if to emphasise his differences with the Dalai Lama, the former Gaden Tripa took along Yongyal Rinpoche and Lama Thubten Phurpu, two outspoken US-based Shugden worshipping monks. Both are former residents of the Sera Mey Monastery's Pomra Khangtsen (House) in Bylakuppe, Karnataka. Two living Buddhas, Kondhor Jewon Tulku, and Khanang Jam-yang Ten-pen-yima, who currently live in Switzerland met officials from the CCP's United Front Work Department. Their visit coincided with a conclave of Shugden Diety worshippers held in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, in July 2011. The former Gaden Tripa worships the Shugden Diety, which has been prohibited by the Dalai Lama, but which group has been overtly backed by the Chinese authorities since 2007. Deepening the schism, the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama also worships the Shugden Diety.

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the 60th anniversary celebrations of the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet. Among them were Gangchen Lama, a well known critic of the Dalai Lama and worshipper of the Shugden Diety. The Milan-based monk travels

often to China and has been permitted to renovate a couple of monasteries in Tibet. Akong Tulku, a former close associate of Tai Situ Rinpoche and who retains close links with the Chinese authorities, was another invitee. Akong Tulku has his headquarters at Samyeling Monastery in Scotland and has ongoing projects in Tibet. He has been critical of the Dalai Lama's establishment. There was another representative from the UK, namely Karma Hardy, who till recently used to head the Tibet Foundation, UK. Invitees included representatives of other traditions like Jamyang of Sweden of the Kargyu Drikung tradition and Thinlay Rinchen, an Australia-based high ranking monk of the Sakya tradition. Kondor Tulku Jigme Palden, possibly of the Taklung Kagyu tradition, and Tsultrim Taser were two high ranking monks visiting from Switzerland. Of them, Kondor Tulku Jigme Palden was conferred an honour by the Chinese.

There was, predictably, a bid to use the anniversary celebrations to garner legitimacy for Gyaincain Norbu, the Chinese-nominated Panchen Lama and get him acceptance among Tibetans. Gyaincain Norbu was scheduled to visit the Labrang Tashi Khyil Monastery in Tibet's Amdo region from July 20 to 30, but this had to be aborted due to 'opposition' from local Tibetans. Labrang Tashi Khyil is the main Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the area and was the scene of major demonstrations against Chinese rule during the protests in 2008. Gyaincain Norbu is now likely to visit the monastery some time in August, 2011 for an extended stay that could stretch to a few months and possibly include visits to

other monasteries. The Norzin Potrang Palace in the monastery has been readied for Gyaincain Norbu and CCTV cameras and armed police personnel deployed around it. It is currently the residence of the head of Labrang Monastery, Jamyang Jabpa, who is also Deputy Director of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Gansu Province.

The decision of the Chinese authorities to base Gyaincain Norbu here, at least for some period, instead of in Beijing would be

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intended to keep him in the midst of Tibetans so that he could expand his political role and influence. It is an attempt to acquire control over Tibetan Buddhist culture in the Amdo region, where Tibetan identity is strong and has found popular expression periodically. There is neither any precedence for installing a Panchen Lama at Labrang. The Panchen Lama's traditional seat is the Tashilhunpo Monastery near Lhasa and his second seat is at Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai province. The move to shift Gyaincain Norbu in the midst of Tibetans would be an important element in the plans of Chinese authorities to boost his influence while conveying the impression to the outside world that Tibetan Buddhist traditions are being protected. Gyaincain Norbu has indicated his political and ideological leanings in his remarks that Buddhism's responsibility is "to foster

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patriotism and national unity." He has already been appointed Vice-President of the official Chinese Buddhist Association and appointed to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

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has accordingly stepped up efforts to sow division in the Tibetan religious ecclesiastical hierarchy and divide the exiled Tibetan community. It is simultaneously attempting to undermine the influence of the Dalai Lama and isolate him. Beijing perceives the present situation as ideal to weaken the Dalai Lama's movement and compel the XIVth Dalai Lama's successors to find new methods at accommodation. Invitations to the World Buddhist Forums, TAR anniversaries etc are all calibrated to weaken the unity of Tibetan Buddhist monks.



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