

## Self-immolation wave resumes in Tibet

Since February 2009, 136 Tibetans have **self-immolated** in Tibet. This unprecedented wave of **self-immolations** seemed to have ceased in April 2014, as no further cases have been registered since. However, two incidents of **self-immolation** occurred in September 2014 (see [Tibet Brief edition nr. 46 of November 2014](#)).



Sangye Khar

Tseypey

Kalsang Yeshe

In December 2014, three **self-immolations** took place in the same week.

On December 16, a Tibetan man in his mid thirties named as **Sangye Khar** set fire to himself and died outside a police station in Amchok, Sangchu (the Tibetan area of Amdo), according to Tibetan sources in exile. His body was taken away by paramilitary police despite protests from Tibetans.

Then on December 22, harrowing images and a video emerged from Tibet of the self-immolation of a 19-year old Tibetan woman in the centre of a town in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), the Tibetan area of Amdo.

She was identified by exile sources as

**Tseypey**, the fourth of six children from a family in Meruma township, and the same sources say that she died on the scene.

Police reportedly took her 60-year old father and 50-year old mother away, but it is not clear whether they have been detained. The [video of the woman burning](#), with a voice in the background chanting prayers, has circulated on social media. Images depict her body being removed afterwards by police. According to other Tibetan sources in exile, internet access was restricted in the area and local phones were blocked when the self-immolation occurred.

On December 23, a Tibetan monk known

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for his Buddhist teaching set fire to himself and died in Tawu, the Tibetan area of Kham, according to reports from Tibetans in exile. **Kalsang Yeshe** self-immolated near a police station that had been established recently by his monastery, Nyitso. Repression of monks and local people has been particularly intense in recent years.

Local people gathered afterwards to call for the return of his body from police in order to carry out traditional religious

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ceremonies, according to Tibetans from the area who are now in exile.

A graphic image of the burning body of **Kalsang Yeshe**, believed to be in his late 20s or 30s, is circulating on social media. According to the same sources, as he set himself on fire **Kalsang Yeshe** called for the return of the **Dalai Lama** to Tibet and for freedom for Tibetans as he set himself on fire.

Armed police removed his body afterwards.

Repression has been particularly intense in Tawu (Chinese: Daofu), Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan. In July, 2013, two monks from Nyitso were shot and injured after police [opened fire on a group of Tibetans](#) who had been celebrating the **Dalai Lama's** birthday. ■

## 'Counter-terrorism' measures and troop deployments stepped up in Tibet

The Communist Party leadership is increasing its emphasis on the need for political control of Tibet and its central importance for the 'stability' of the whole of the **People's Republic of China**. Since May 2014, an important part of this policy has been the expansion of an aggressive '**counter-terrorism**' drive to Tibet, as part of a larger effort taking place in Xinjiang and across China, which has resulted in an intensified militarization of the plateau.

As a result of this policy shift, major military drills have been organized in several parts of Tibet. Moreover, in the week that the 'counter-terrorism' drive was announced and promoted across the **PRC** last May, the authorities in the **TAR** announced a training session for police stationed in Tibetan monasteries. The establishment of police stations in monasteries is a key objective in rolling out the new agenda of intensified control.

The Chinese authorities underlined the significance of the counter-terrorism drive in the context of intensified levels of militarization and emphasis on security in both Eastern Turkestan (Chinese: Xinjiang) and Tibet in a legal opinion published on September 22, 2014 in the state media. This sets out the Party position on the handling of the counter-terrorist drive, conflating "**violent terrorist ideology**" with actions that may be completely non-violent, such as "**splittism**" and undermining of "**ethnic unity**".

On December 16, large deployments of armed troops with riot shields were on the streets of central Lhasa, as Tibetans gathered to mark a major Tibetan religious festival, the anniversary of the death of **Tsongkhapa**, founder of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) school of Tibetan Buddhism. Images show crowds of pilgrims by the holy Jokhang temple in a powerful display of devotion, and camouflaged troops with riot shields and firemen in red uniforms with fire extinguishers at the scene.

The religious festival fell on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the 10th Tibetan month (coinciding with December 16, 2014). It is traditionally marked by lighting of butter-lamps.

The mass gathering of both pilgrims and troops follows earlier major demonstrations of armed force at the time of peaceful religious festivals in Tibet over the past two years. In 2012, similar images emerged from Lhasa

at the time of the festival of troops and firemen gathered outside the Jokhang temple, including troops in black uniforms, with some in camouflage uniform.

In 2013, massed ranks of armed troops confronted pilgrims attending peaceful gatherings in major monasteries in eastern Tibet. Vivid images disseminated on social media showed higher numbers of Tibetans than usual gathering to pray at major monasteries – Labrang and Kumbum – during the Monlam (prayer festival), also associated with Tsongkhapa, as troops stood guard or encircled the pilgrims.

Images of recently conducted military drills in Tibet emerged on December 24, 2014 on the People's Daily Online and are available [here](#). ■



## Harsh new religious 'rectification' drive in Tibet

On September 12, 2014, a new 'rectification campaign' was introduced at a county level in Driru (Chinese: Biru), Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) prefecture of the **Tibet Autonomous Region**. It was implemented as part of a broader political campaign and paramilitary crackdown following Tibetan resistance against the authorities' efforts to compel Tibetans to display the Chinese national flag from their homes. The campaign intensified in early October 2013 when villagers refused to fly the flags, with some throwing them into a river instead. Since September 2013, dozens of Tibetans have been detained and authorities have instituted more systematic oppression and deployment of troops in a bid to prevent political unrest spreading to other parts of Nagchu and the Tibet Autonomous Region.

According to new measures imposed in September 2014, monasteries deemed 'illegal' will be torn down and Tibetans who possess images of the **Dalai Lama** or place traditional prayer (mani) stones will be severely punished.

The new **Driru** measures indicate a trend towards severe penalties imposed not only on individuals, but also on entire communities in an attempt to compel Tibetans to fall in line with government policies.

Following the imposition of these new regulations, at least 26 Tibetan Buddhist nuns were expelled from a nunnery in **Driru** in a police raid on November 15, 2014 after the nunnery failed to denounce the **Dalai Lama**. This led a work team of officials to examine the registration records of the nunnery to check that its population was in line with the officially imposed quota of 140 nuns.

The new **Driru** 'rectification' regulations are imposed in the context of a legalistic approach that aims to strengthen **Communist Party** control over Tibetan Buddhist practice and weaken religious

institutions still further, as well as escalating the crackdown in lay society. Implementation of policy on religion has been particularly harsh in Tibet because of the close link between religion and Tibetan identity. Tibetan Buddhism continues to be an integral element of Tibetan identity and Tibetan nationalism, and is therefore perceived as a potential threat to the authority of the state and 'unity' of the **PRC**.

The language in the regulations on what constitutes an offense is deliberately opaque. This means it can be subject to interpretation by local officials according to the political climate and drive to secure a conviction of a specific individual or set a particular example. For instance, the measures state that monks and nuns "who interfere in government affairs, administrative, legal or educational" will not only be expelled from their monasteries but will also do "six months of education in law", and may also face criminal charges (Point 41). The exact nature of the 'interference' is not defined, leaving it open to interpretation by the local authorities meaning that monks could be penalized for engagement in

such activities as community education.

The same penalties apply to monks and nuns who "interfere in the mediation of social disputes", although this is a traditional monastic role that is of great benefit to the community, often helping to prevent violent conflict.

The **Driru** rulings are unambiguous in their assertion of punishment for display or 'secretly keeping' **Dalai Lama** images. They state: "Monks and nuns who hang pictures of the Dalai or secretly keep them will be expelled from the monastery community, and forced to complete six months of education in the law" (Point 37).

One of the most serious measures is the instruction that "Religious facilities such as temples, hermitages and retreat cells that are illegally constructed since January 1, 2011 must all be closed down and, within a specific time period, demolished" (Point 42). It is not known how many institutions or monastic retreats may fall under this category. This also applies to 'mani walls' – slabs of stone inscribed with prayers and sacred texts. ■

## 33<sup>rd</sup> round of the EU-China human rights dialogue held in Brussels

On December 8 – 9, 2014 the **European Union** held the 33<sup>rd</sup> round of its human rights dialogue with China in Brussels.

The **International Campaign for Tibet (ICT)** called upon the **EU** to address the worsening of the human rights situation in Tibet and, in particular, to raise the

criminalization measures of **self-immolations** and 'counter-terrorism' campaign as well as the increased use of force by the police and violations of freedom of religion.

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EU and Chinese delegations at the end of the 33<sup>rd</sup> round of the EU-China human rights dialogue, December 2014.

**Vincent Metten**, EU Policy Director at ICT's Brussels office, said: "It is of fundamental importance that the EU does not compromise on its human rights values with China. We urge the EU to be vocal about the situation in Tibet and state clear expectations for progress to the Chinese authorities, drawing upon the outcomes of the first official visit of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to Tibet in September 2013. ICT regrets that the EU has been unable to confront China and resist the more restrictive conditions it imposed on the human rights dialogue, in particular on the unilateral decision imposed by Beijing to half the annual number of rounds of talks from two to one."

The EU-China human rights dialogue has been the oldest of such dialogues between the EU and third countries. Echoing the European Parliament's enduring criticism, ICT has often expressed its concerns about the way the EU has been conducting its human rights dialogue with China, challenging its status quo.

Unfortunately, the dialogue has so far failed to achieve concrete progress on the ground. On the contrary, since **Xi Jinping** assumed power in 2013 the human rights situation in both mainland **China** and Tibet has worsened. The announcement made by Chinese officials during the latest round of the **EU-China** human rights dialogue, held in June 2013, no longer to accept a list of individual cases of political prisoners demonstrates their wish to downgrade the human rights dialogue process.

The two-day dialogue was led by **Mr. Gerhard Sabathil**, Director for North East Asia and the Pacific of the European External Action Service (EEAS), and **Mr. Li Junhua**, Director General for International Organizations and Conferences of **China's** Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Many issues were on the agenda, such as the death penalty, torture, minority rights, and arbitrary detention, among others. The EU's greatest achievement during this round of dialogue was having a press conference at the end of the two days, which ICT greatly welcomed as a step forward in making the dialogue more transparent.

However, the main problem was the refusal by the Chinese authorities to accept the written list of political prisoners, which the EU had prepared. EU officials were able only to mention 20 of those cases orally, out of which three were Tibetans: **Tenzin Delek Rinpoche**, **Lobsang Kunchok** and **Lobsang Tsering**. ■

## Start of the EU Latvian Presidency and ICT's mission to Riga

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) called on Latvia to ensure that the Tibet issue is brought back to the forefront of the Foreign Affairs Council's political agenda, as the Baltic country assumed the six-monthly rotating presidency of the Council on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015.

**Vincent Metten**, EU Policy Director at ICT's Brussels office, said: "The people of the Baltic states, once under Soviet rule, know what it is to face political persecution

under an occupying power. There are many similarities between Latvia's recent history and the current situation in Tibet. For this reason, there is widespread popular support

for the Tibetan cause in Latvia and the other Baltic countries. It is important that policy-makers take civil society's will into consideration on such an important matter."

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"In recent years Beijing has adopted an aggressive diplomatic approach towards EU Member States, pressuring them to block their meetings with the Dalai Lama or Tibetan representatives. The EU and its Member States need to endorse a coordinated position on Tibet to strengthen their leverage and show that it is not up to the Chinese leadership to dictate the political agenda to democratic European

on **EU-China** relations. The hearing was complemented by **Ms. Gyaltsen Drolkar**, a former Tibetan nun, known as one of the "singing nuns of Drapchi prison", who testified before the Committee about her long experience in detention in Tibet. On the same occasion, **ICT** also met with diplomats at the Latvian Foreign Affairs Ministry and handed over its submission to the Latvian Presidency.

As was again vigorously stated during the recent 27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Task Force on Sino-Tibetan Negotiations held in Dharamsala on January 5-6, the objective of the dialogue is to find a mutually agreed solution for Tibet to achieve genuine Tibetan autonomy within the Chinese borders, without calling for independence and refuting the "One-China policy".

Moreover, **ICT** sees the rethinking of the **EU's** human rights policy towards **China** and Tibet, including the **EU-China** human rights dialogue, as an urgent priority for the credibility of the **EU's** foreign policy, as three new cases of self-immolation occurred in December 2014, bringing the total number up to 136 since February 2009.

**ICT's** submission to the Latvian Presidency highlights the high responsibility of countries such as Latvia, which have themselves experienced foreign occupation. Moreover, Latvia holds the **EU** Presidency in the period leading up to the **Dalai Lama's** 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in July, a key event for the Tibetan movement and its commitment to the promotion of a political culture of non-violence and dialogue.

Pushing for a more unified and ambitious approach to human rights in Tibet would prove Latvia's strong support for the values on which the **EU** is founded. ■



ICT staff with Members of the Latvian Parliament in Riga, December 2014.

countries," added **Vincent Metten**.

Last month, **ICT** undertook a mission to Riga where the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of the Latvian Parliament hosted a hearing on Tibet. **ICT** briefed the Committee on the recent developments on the ground in Tibet and

**ICT** recommended a more active Latvian support in promoting the resumption of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, which has been stalled since 2010, and the adoption of an **EU** statement at the beginning of 2015 to mark the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the last round of talks between the Chinese government and the representatives of the **Dalai Lama**.

## ICT concerned about the cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries

The International Campaign for Tibet (**ICT**) is concerned that the **EU** policy on China will be weakened due to the summit of Heads of Government of China and Central and Eastern European countries that took place on December 15-17 in Belgrade, Serbia.

**ICT** has long insisted that the **EU** hold a coherent policy towards **China** mainstreaming human rights and democracy. This format of cooperation is deeply worrying as it may weaken the position

of the **EU vis à vis China** and is devised by Beijing as a tool to divide and rule – i.e. to do business without having to consider the human rights standards and democratic scrutiny of the

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**EU.** Moreover, human rights are notably absent from the agenda of the **China-CEEC** – or 16+1 – Summit, especially when bearing in mind the wide scope of the cooperation.

The **EU** Member States participating in this summit should take a stand on issues such as freedom of expression, assembly and religion as well as discriminatory policies in Tibet. In particular, the critical situation of Tibet should be put on the agenda as a follow-up of the CEEC delegation visit to Tibet Autonomous Region in July 2014.

**China-CEEC cooperation involves the EU Member States** – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia – the non-**EU** countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Montenegro, Serbia – and **the People's Republic of China.**

This cooperation format foresees annual summits; promoting investment, economic and trade cooperation; expanding financial cooperation; enhancing cooperation in connectivity; expanding cooperation in science,

technology, innovation, environmental protection and energy; promoting dynamic people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cooperation; and encouraging cooperation on sub-national level.

**China** and the Central and Eastern European Countries' Cooperation was started three years ago in Budapest, and then continued and deepened during the meetings in Warsaw in April 2012 and Bucharest in November 2013, making the summit in Belgrade the third of its kind. ■

## ICT Facebook petition

The International Campaign for Tibet launched a petition to Facebook calling **CEO Mark Zuckerberg** to account after a video of a self-immolation in Tibet posted by a prominent Tibetan writer was deleted. In another disturbing example last week, the Facebook account of a well-known Chinese writer in exile was blocked after he posted a photograph of a nude protestor.

On December 26, Tibetan writer and activist Tsering Woese used her Facebook page to post a report and video of a Buddhist monk's **self-immolation** in Tibet, Kalsang Yeshe. Within hours, Facebook deleted the post because it allegedly violated the social media giant's "community standards."

Four days later, **Liao Yiwu**, a Chinese writer who has been based in Berlin for the last four years, was locked out of his Facebook account, after posting photographs of a nude or mostly-nude protestor.

The two incidents follow a visit of **China's** internet chief Lu Wei to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg at his offices in the U.S in December 2014. Photos were posted of **Lu Wei**, who heads up **China's** systematic internet censorship operation to block information, with the Facebook CEO, who has a book by **Xi Jinping** prominently placed on the desk. ■

To sign the petition, please click [here](#).

### Political prisoners focus

#### Pema Rigzin and Kelsang Yarphe



Kelsang Yarphe

Pema Rigzin

Two prominent members of the Tibetan folk music industry have been given harsh prison sentences and heavy fines for their involvement in the making of Tibetan folk music in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) County, according to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD).

On November 27, well-known folk singer and music producer **Pema Rigzin** and famed singer **Kelsang Yarphe** were sentenced together to lengthy prison sentences and given severe fines by the Intermediate People's Court in Chengdu, Sichuan Province.

**Pema Rigzin** was sentenced to two and a half years in prison and a severe fine of 50,000 yuan for composing, releasing,

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and distributing music with alleged political overtones. Rigzin was detained on May 7, 2013 in Chengdu city, and held incommunicado until his trial. Though family members were allowed to attend the trial, they were barred by authorities from hiring Rigzin a lawyer.

Rigzin began his singing career in 1982 and became famous for songs such as "Tears" and "Remembrance Song for Snowland." In 2008, he cut short his singing career in order to establish a recording studio in Chengdu, where he focused on producing other Tibetan singers' records and DVDs, including those of **Kelsang Yarphel**. TCHRD sources report that on numerous occasions he was pressured by authorities to shut down his studio.

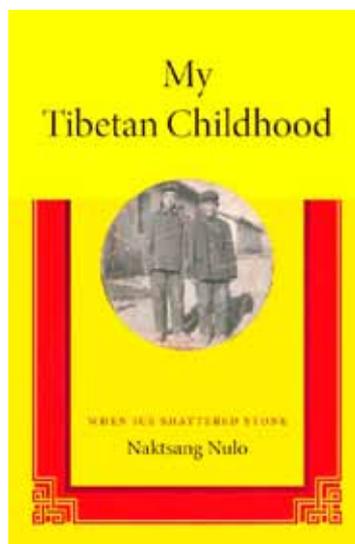
**Kelsang Yarphel**, another prominent Tibetan singer, was sentenced alongside **Pema Rigzin** on November 27. Accused of

unknown charges, he was sentenced to four years in prison and given an immense 200,000 yuan fine. As reported by TCHRD, **Kelsang Yarphel** was detained by authorities in Lhasa on July 14, 2013 on charges that he performed a song with alleged political overtones at a concert there. Following his arrest, he was held in a detention centre in Chengdu for one and a half years.

Yarphel is a popular folk singer and composer of well-known songs such as "The Homeland of the Gesar of Ling," "Modern Tibetans," and "Dragon's Thunder Welcomes the Spring." He has performed frequently at government and private concerts, and organized other Tibetan musical events, such as a musical celebration of Losar aired on Tibetan language TV in Qinghai Province. Though some of Yarphel's music encouraged Tibetan unity, none has been known to express political ideology. ■

Reading suggestion

## My Tibetan Childhood



The book "My Tibetan Childhood: When Ice Shattered Stone" by Naktsang Nulo was first published in 2007 in Tibetan. After becoming the most reprinted Tibetan literary work in history, it was banned by Beijing in 2010. It then appeared in a Chinese translation in Taipei in 2011. It has been recently translated into English for the first time and published by Duke University Press. ■

You can read a review by the Taipei Times at the following link:

<http://www.taipetimes.com/News/feat/archives/2015/01/01/2003608068>

## Upcoming Events

- ▶ **2 – 27 MARCH:**  
UN HUMAN RIGHTS  
COUNCIL 28<sup>TH</sup> SESSION
- ▶ **14 MARCH:**  
EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY  
RALLY FOR TIBET IN  
PARIS



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