



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China tightens control, total surveillance measures, for 60th anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising

<http://www.savetibet.org/china-tightens-control-and-surveillance-measures-for-60th-anniversary-of-tibetan-national-uprising/>

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Tibetans are preparing to observe the [60th anniversary of the March 10 anniversary of Tibet's National Uprising in 1959](#), which coincides this year with high-level political meetings in Beijing known as the “Two Sessions.”

The Tibet Autonomous Region has experienced an unusually long closure to foreign tourists, spanning from January 30 until April 1. This year marks the significant 60th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising, the Dalai Lama's escape, and 60 years of the Tibetan diaspora in exile - and also the 70th anniversary year of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The tightened controls in place for the anniversary period reflect the Chinese leadership's efforts to obliterate loyalty to the Dalai Lama and replace it entirely with allegiance to the Communist Party, with a particular focus on the “Sinicization” of Tibetan Buddhism. In the buildup to March, the Chinese authorities have sought to enforce the display of images of Xi Jinping and Chinese leaders – in some areas compelling Tibetans even to prostrate to those images – and there have been “clean-up” campaigns targeting images of the Dalai Lama.¹

During this period the Chinese authorities have made it particularly dangerous for Tibetans to communicate with the outside world, and severe information restrictions are in place in the context of a steady escalation in securitization across Tibet and the imposition of total surveillance. The International Campaign for Tibet has monitored the following developments in the buildup to March 10:

- A series of official meetings in Tibet including at monasteries in Lhasa have focused on the elimination of “evil forces” – a reference to the Dalai Lama's influence - and the importance of “stability”, a political term in the PRC emphasized at the highest levels which refers to the crushing of all dissent, cultural and religious expression, and ensuring complete compliance to Party rule. The demonization of religion is particularly strident, consistent with the emphasis at the highest levels in Beijing.
- A directive circulating on social media warns of the imprisonment of users of WeChat for sharing content during the anniversary period “that harms the Communist Party and the nation.” Organizers of WeChat groups would also be punished for such content, the circular stated.

¹ International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘Chinese response to Tibet reciprocity bill signals its fear of US support for Tibet’, January 7, 2019, <https://www.savetibet.org/chinese-response-to-tibet-reciprocity-bill-signals-its-fear-of-us-support-for-tibet/>

- The authorities chose the anniversary week to announce a new element of networked authoritarianism - facial recognition and real-time monitoring in taxis in Lhasa.² Even in a cab, it will be possible for the authorities to monitor every conversation and the movement of individuals in Tibet's historic and cultural capital. The development underlines that the security state in Tibet is imposed at a much deeper level than the more overt approach of uniformed paramilitary on the streets at the time of sensitive anniversaries.
- Further restrictions on movement banning travel for Tibetans in certain areas of eastern Tibet have been imposed at local levels. For instance Tibetans in Derge county, Kardze (in Chinese, Ganzi), Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Kham) have been banned from travelling until after March 10, even between villages and towns.³
- Surveillance of Tibetan pilgrims from the eastern Tibetan areas of Kham and Amdo has been intensified and all the areas around the Barkor and the Potala Palace, the winter home of the Dalai Lama, are guarded by both uniformed and plainclothes Chinese security personnel.⁴
- At a press conference in Beijing, Tibet Autonomous Region Party Secretary Wu Yingjie asserted the Communist Party's hard line against the Dalai Lama, stating that he hadn't done "a single good thing" for the region since he escaped into exile 60 years ago. In an oblique reference to the Chinese authorities' angry response to the passing into law of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act in December,⁵ Wu Yingjie said that foreigners should be "grateful" for the "precautions" in place that restrict access because of the high altitude of Tibet.⁶

In the buildup to the March 10 anniversary this year the Chinese authorities emphasized the need to attack "separatism" and "destructive activities incited by hostile forces at home and abroad." At a meeting focusing on security measures for the anniversary in Shigatse (Chinese: Rikaze), the Tibet Autonomous Region, Zhang Yanqing, Party Secretary and Vice Governor of Shigatse City stated the imperative of upholding Xi Jinping's "socialist ideology [...] in the new era "it is of fundamental importance to fight against separatism and safeguard national security."⁷ In a reference to the Dalai Lama, Zhang Yanqing said that it was important to attack the leader of the "separatists" and the "destructive activities incited by the hostile forces at home and abroad." and that it is a "glorious mission" to "maintain social stability this year, especially in March."

At Drepung monastery, one of the 'Great Three' Tibetan monasteries, a "mobilization meeting" was held to prepare for work at the time of the sensitive anniversary and underline the Party's policies of "social stability" in the monasteries.⁸ Policing of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries is now coordinated under the central five-year plan for Sinicization of religion in a much more systematic way than before. At the high-level meetings in Beijing this week, Wang Yang, the fourth highest ranking official in the Politburo hierarchy and head of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), referred to the importance of "adapting" religion to socialism for China's "national security."⁹

² Lhasa uses facial recognition, big data analysis in new taxis, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1141065.shtml>

³ Tibetans Restricted in Sichuan, Gansu Ahead of Uprising Anniversary <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/restricted-03062019154656.html>

⁴ China Questions Tibetan Pilgrims in Lhasa as Sensitive Anniversaries Approach <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/pilgrims-03042019153134.html>

⁵ International Campaign for Tibet report, 'Chinese response to Tibet reciprocity bill signals its fear of US support for Tibet', January 7, 2019, <https://www.savetibet.org/chinese-response-to-tibet-reciprocity-bill-signals-its-fear-of-us-support-for-tibet/>

⁶ Comments reported by Associated Press, March 6, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/1d44a5fefb864603aad52c9866bc3396>

⁷ Shigatse News in Chinese, March 4, 2019, http://www.rkzw.cn/szyw/201903/t20190304_11416728.htm

⁸ Presided over by Chinese official Xu Xueguang, Chairman of the "Supervisory group" of the Tibetan People's Congress. Lhasa Evening News in Chinese, March 3, 2019, <http://www.lasa-eveningnews.com.cn/lrsb/pc/content/201903/03/c60363.html>

⁹ Global Times, March 5, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1140925.shtml>

In a visit to Tibet last year, Wang Yang stressed the importance of tightening control over religion.¹⁰ The Party authorities deliberately conflate ‘extremism’ and even terrorism with religion and blame the Dalai Lama for “inciting separatism,” despite the absence of any violent insurgency in Tibet.

In Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Amdo), the Party authorities spoke about the “complex” political situation at the time of the anniversary. Ngaba is the area where self-immolations began in February 2009, and the statement is likely to reflect that despite the intense levels of militarization the Party authorities particularly at a local level still have uncertainties over their authority. The same state media article revealed that former political prisoners were among those particularly under suspicion at the time of the March anniversary and the “Two Sessions” in Beijing.¹¹

Also in Ngaba, delegations were deployed across the county to hold conferences on “social stability” specifically for the “sensitive period in March and Two Sessions”. The meetings were focused on the crackdown on crimes “and eliminating evil forces”, which the authorities use as a term applying to the Dalai Lama and his supporters, and a stepping up of security patrols on the ground.¹²

In Lhasa this week, Tibetan pilgrims are under intensified scrutiny as oppressive measures have intensified. The Tibetan service Radio Free Asia reported that prior to March 10 and 14: “They are also being asked to keep their mobile phones switched on at all times, and are being reminded to strictly abide by the law and not to become involved in any activities considered to be harmful to [China’s] national security,” according to a source.¹³ Radio Free Asia also reported that a clampdown in Dege County in Kardze, Sichuan, an area where there were numerous protests in 2008, means that Tibetans cannot even travel freely between villages and towns on March 10, according to a local source.¹⁴ It is possible that other restrictions on movement around March 10 may be in place, but are not known due to the restrictions in place.

Tightened surveillance: cyber restrictions and taxis equipped with new facial recognition tech

A circular released by government departments in Kanlho (Chinese: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu warned that posting “any information harmful to the Party, government and society” on the social media messaging network WeChat would be regarded as “a criminal act,” stating that cyber restrictions would be carried out from March 1 (2019). The warning stated that: “March is an unusual month of especial security concerns and extra efforts will be added in terms of monitoring and managing Wechat groups.[...] If any Wechat group members publish any illegal information against the laws, he or she will be sentenced to [between] one and eight years in prison and the same thing will be done to the Wechat group organiser.” The circular also warned against the spreading of “rumours,” which is also characterized as a crime. Using such opaque language, the Party state can characterize almost any expression of Tibetan cultural or religious identity, or mild and moderate statement, in these terms.

On March 5, Chinese state-run newspaper Global Times announced the rollout of 200 taxis equipped with facial recognition and real-time monitoring.¹⁵ While the Global Times asserted that the purpose was to “help with driving security checks and to ensure passenger safety,” the new tech in taxis is consistent with the much more systematic approach by the authorities which has led to one of the

¹⁰ International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘China tightens screws on Tibetan Buddhism’, September 11, 2018, <https://www.savetibet.org/china-tightens-screws-on-tibetan-buddhism/>

¹¹ Local government website in Chinese, March 5, 2019, http://www.heishui.gov.cn/jryw/xzdtjryw/201903/t20190305_1386779.html

¹² Local government website in Chinese, March 4, 2019, http://www.wenchuan.gov.cn/p/st_news_items_i_4b06f202bd954a83be070bce93055296

¹³ China Questions Tibetan Pilgrims in Lhasa as Sensitive Anniversaries Approach, Radio Free Asia, March 4, 2019.

¹⁴ Tibetans Restricted in Sichuan, Gansu Ahead of Uprising Anniversary, Radio Free Asia, March 6, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/restricted-03062019154656.html>

¹⁵ Lhasa uses facial recognition, big data analysis in new taxis <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1141065.shtml>

most dystopian and penetrative security states in the world being imposed in Tibet. It is a system that combines cutting edge surveillance technology with the deployment of tens of thousands of Party cadres in monasteries and people's homes and involving renewed efforts to influence and shape Tibetan thoughts and beliefs.

In this drive for political "stability," the Chinese government seeks the involvement of every individual Tibetan. Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region Wu Yingjie illustrated this when he referred to the requirement to: "Make grassroots Party organisations effective battle fortresses, raise the level of comprehensive rectification [...] Carry through the principles of prevention as the key, attention to problematic issues, sifting through the multitude of opinion, and readily responding to any enquiry [or challenge]."¹⁶

Chinese authorities will mark the 60th anniversary of its disastrous 'Democratic Reform' introduced in Tibet in 1959, soon after the Tibetan National Uprising. The Democratic Reform in fact led to Tibetans experiencing widespread famine for the first time in its history, and being swept up in the political and economic chaos and suffering of China's Cultural Revolution.

The Chinese authorities in Tibet have co-opted Tibetans into promoting their narrative; using state media platforms to tell the stories of "feudal serfs" they claim to have liberated, and to obliterate any conversation of the real legacy of March 10. For example, a China Daily report on March 6 was typical, telling the story of a farmer in her eighties, and stating that: "It was not until 1959 when China's People's Liberation Army arrived and told them that the serf system had been abolished that they resumed full freedom."¹⁷

¹⁶ ChinaTibetNews (Tibetan), October 1, 2017, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/zw/ldhd/201710/t20171001_1988149.html

¹⁷ http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/index/rolling/201903/t20190306_6518380.html